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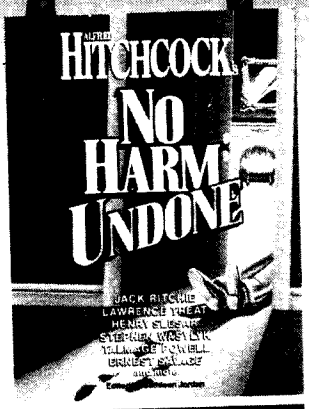

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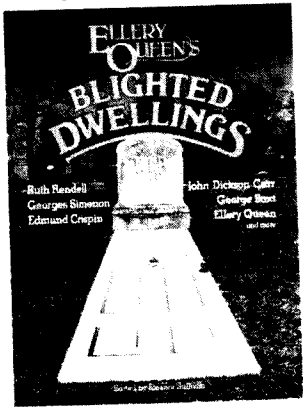

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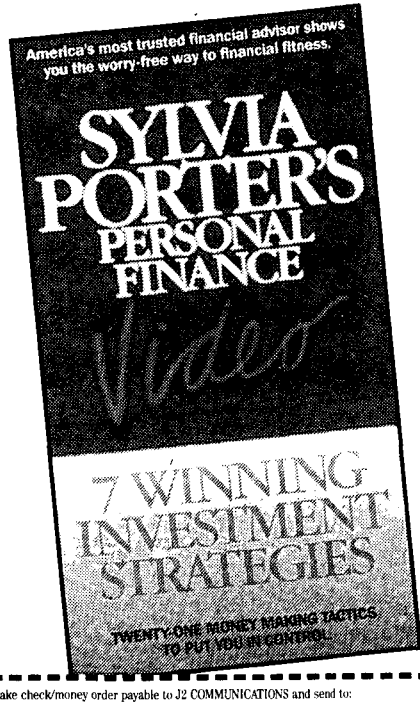
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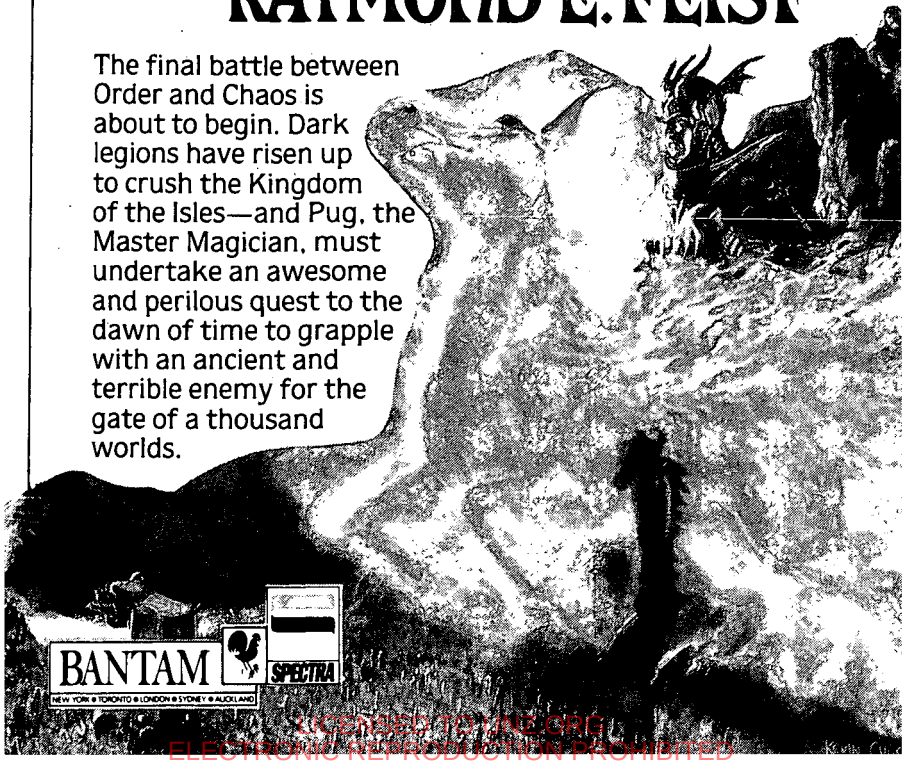

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On our cover are SHARON GLESS and TYNE DALY as Cagney & Lacey

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Ben studied the white-haired hotel owner across the table from him. Douglas Ratherford seemed every inch the British Victorian gentleman. He had an English accent and carried a walking stick with an ivory knob. "I could come for a month," Ben decided, "to try it out."

"That's fine! With any luck, we wouldn't need you longer than that."

"What is it that's been happening at the hotel? Thefts from the rooms, things like that?"

Ratherford took a deep breath. "Last week a guest hanged himself from the bandstand roof . . ."

THE VICTORIAN HANGMAN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Ben Snow had been to California only once before, when he visited Sacramento in 1885. Now, five years later, as he stepped off the Southern Pacific train at the town of Oceanfront, it seemed like a different world. Southern California, especially the area south of Los Angeles, was nothing like the cities to the north. There were palm trees across the street from the station and even the air felt different here.

When Ben was first offered the job of guarding the summer guests at Oceanfront Gardens, he'd turned it down. "You need a Pinkerton man," he told Douglas Ratherford. "You don't need me."

"I've been told you're a fast gun and you have a good brain," Ratherford said. "That's the combination I want. Most of the Pinkertons are nothing but strike-breaking goons."

"I'd have to stable my horse and take the train to Oceanfront."

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"Would that be so difficult? I'd make it worth your while."

Ben studied the white-haired man across the table from him. Douglas Ratherford seemed every inch the British Victorian gentleman. He had an English accent and carried a walking stick with an ivory knob. "I could come for a month," Ben decided, "to try it out."

"That's fine! With any luck, we wouldn't need you longer than that."

"What is it that's been happening at the hotel? Thefts from the rooms, things like that?"

Ratherford took a deep breath. "Last week a guest hanged himself from the bandstand roof."

"A suicide can happen anywhere."

"Everyone calls it a suicide except the poor man's wife. She pointed out that the noose was an elaborate one with the traditional thirteen turns of the rope such as hangmen use. She claims her husband couldn't even tie a square knot."

"Still—"

"And then there's this note. It came in Monday's mail."

Ben read the simple message, printed in block letters:

ONE FOR THE HANGMAN. MORE TO COME.

"A crank," he suggested.

"Probably. But I'll feel better with you on the scene, Mr. Snow."

"I'm not a detective. I'm a hired gun."

Douglas Ratherford nodded. "I think that's what I need."

A horse-drawn carriage was waiting at the station to take Ben to the Oceanfront Hotel. He'd been expecting it, and the only surprise was the driver, a girl in her late teens who wore pants and a man's jacket and covered her long black hair with a jockey cap. "I'm Ben Snow," he said. "Are you from the Oceanfront Hotel?"

"That's right, climb aboard." She took the carpetbag he was carrying and heaved it easily onto the rear of the carriage. Then she climbed up and took her place behind the horse. As they started to move, she looked back at him with a faint smile. "I'm Emily Strait. Welcome to Southern California."

"Is it always this hot here?"

"It is in August. You picked a bad month."

"It was picked for me."

They were silent for the next ten minutes, until the carriage passed through a gate marked *Oceanfront Gardens*. "Mr. Ratherford has built this into a real seaside resort," she explained with a touch

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of pride in her voice. "The hotel has only thirty rooms but it's done in true Victorian style, just like you'd find at Brighton or Blackpool. There's even a small amusement park with a boardwalk and everything. Of course, the gardens are the main attraction. You can see them through the trees to your left."

Ben glimpsed the colorful bursts of tropic blossoms, but his attention was distracted by his first sight of the hotel itself. The Ocean-front was like no hotel he'd seen before—a colossal collection of towers and turrets, fancifully decorated in a style that reminded him of a gingerbread house he'd once seen in a Kansas City bakery.

"It's breathtaking," he said.

"Isn't it? My father designed it himself, after one he admired in England."

"Your father?"

"Douglas Ratherford is my father. I use my mother's maiden name with guests."

"I see. Is your mother here, too?"

"My parents are separated. She lives in Los Angeles. But I see her often."

"You don't have an accent, like your father."

She pulled up in front of the hotel and went to retrieve Ben's bag from the rear. "I was born in California. My father met my mother after he came here."

"Here, let me take that."

But she held onto the carpetbag. "No, I earn my keep here."

The lobby of the hotel was, if anything, even more impressive than the exterior. A marble floor and a great sweeping staircase were set off by potted palms and ferns that seemed to grow everywhere and even hung from the ceiling. A room clerk was busy at the desk checking in the latest guests, but Emily Strait ignored the desk and headed directly for the staircase.

Ben followed her to a small room at the end of the first-floor hall. "It's not very big, but I think you'll find it satisfactory," she told him. "My father will be in his office when you get unpacked."

She left him alone and he walked to the window to take in the view. The room looked down on the bandstand, where the body had been found. He wondered if that had been a factor in its choice for him.

Douglas Ratherford showed him around the hotel and grounds personally, and introduced him to a few of the other employees,

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certainly making no secret of Ben's presence. "If we do have a killer on the loose, I hope you'll scare him off," he told Ben. "Let him go down the beach to one of the other resort hotels."

"Are there many?"

"More every year. Southern California seems to have discovered Victorian England."

They passed through the dining room, where full-length windows looked out to the sea, and paused for a moment in the kitchen, where Ben was surprised to see a number of Chinese at work. "The Chinese are good cooks," Ratherford commented. "In here we have the gentlemen's bar and billiard room. Ladies are strictly excluded. This is Reno Hawkins." Ratherford introduced the tall moustached man behind the bar. "Reno, I want you to meet Ben Snow. I've taken him on as a guard after what happened last week."

Hawkins had a firm handshake. "Snow—that name is familiar. Ever been to Reno or Salt Lake?"

"Passed through," Ben admitted.

"I heard tell of a fellow by that name who was mighty fast with a gun. That was maybe ten, twelve years ago, but he was barely twenty then."

"There were some good card games in Reno the last time I was there," Ben remarked, casually changing the subject.

"We have some good ones here in the evening. Stop by if you get a chance."

Douglas Ratherford continued the tour, showing Ben the library lounge. "Something for the ladies, and gentlemen who don't like the bar," he explained. He led Ben out to the lawn next, and around back to the stable area. Then, "Here's the bandstand," Ratherford announced. The octagonal wooden structure had colored bunting draped from the roof, a reminder of the last concert.

"I saw it from my window," Ben said. "This is where the body was found?"

"Hanging right there." Ratherford pointed. "His name was Harley Foster—he was down from San Francisco with his wife. He was a newspaper editor up there."

"Did you speak to his wife about the note you received?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet?" Ben said.

"Well, she's still here. She didn't return to San Francisco with the body."

"Isn't that odd? Where can I find her?"

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"I didn't hire you to investigate Foster's death, Snow. Only to prevent anything like it happening here again."

"I have to do one before I can do the other," Ben explained.

Ratherford gave Ben a long, thoughtful look. "I believe I saw her in the library when we passed through. I'll introduce you."

Linda Foster proved to be a charming, attractive woman, who wore the latest in fashion and her reddish hair in a high bun with curls against the forehead. After the introductions and a few sympathetic words, the hotel owner retreated and left Ben alone with the widow.

"Mr. Ratherford told me he has hired you to look into the matter of my husband's death. Does he agree that he didn't take his own life?"

"That's what I'd like to ask you. Did he have any reason for committing suicide?"

"None whatever."

"Has the funeral been held?"

"I—there's to be a memorial service next week in San Francisco."

"If you'll excuse my asking, why didn't—?"

Ben's question was cut short by the arrival of a dark-haired man with grey sideburns, wearing a pair of glasses clipped to his nose. "Oh, Reggie—I didn't expect you back so soon! Isn't there a game in the men's bar?"

"Reno says it won't start till after dinner. Who's this?" He eyed Ben speculatively.

"Ben Snow, Reginald Cascourt. Reggie's a new friend of mine from New York."

Ben judged the man to be in his late forties, though the grey sideburns and glasses made him appear older. "Pleased to meet you," he said.

"Likewise." Cascourt looked Ben up and down. "You dress like a cowpoke."

Ben laughed. "I do that work sometimes."

"Do you have a gun?"

Ben smiled. "It's in my room. I hope I won't need it here. I'm working for Mr. Ratherford, tending to the needs of the guests."

Reggie Cascourt nodded. "I'm glad he has someone, after what happened to Mr. Foster last week."

"What do *you* think happened to him?"

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"Well, I don't believe he hanged himself. I think he had a little help from someone."

"Any idea who?"

"No."

"Let's not talk about it, Reggie," Linda said firmly. "It upsets me." She turned to Ben. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Snow. I hope we'll see more of each other."

Ben returned her smile and gave a little bow of assent. She was certainly a charming woman. He watched while the two of them left the room in the direction of the lobby. Only then did he remember he had one more question to ask her.

He glanced around the small library, picking up a copy of a new novel titled *Three Men in a Boat.* But he'd never been much of a reader and he tried a copy of the Los Angeles newspaper instead. Neither the world news—ANGLO-FRENCH CONVENTION MEETS ON NIGERIA—nor the latest from back east—NEW YORK EXECUTION IS FIRST USE OF ELECTRIC CHAIR—interested him particularly, but he did read a story on the new state of Wyoming, barely a month old.

Ben had hoped Linda Foster might return to the library following her conversation with Cascourt, but finally he drifted out and was seated in the lobby a half hour later when Ratherford found him. "Come quickly," he whispered. "There's been another one."

"Another—"

"This way."

Ben followed Ratherford out the door and around the back of the hotel, where the owner pulled open the door of a large storage shed outside the kitchen. "I noticed it was unlocked and looked inside. This is what I found."

It was one of the Chinese cooks, hanging from the overhead beam of the shed.

"His name is Kai Feng," Ratherford said. "He's worked for me for about a year."

Ben had cut him down, but it was too late. The body was already stiffening. And this time the note had been left with the body, pinned to a sleeve:

NUMBER TWO FOR THE HANGMAN. MORE TO COME.

"Did you tell anyone about the first note?" Ben asked.

"Only you."

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"Then it's the same person. I just wonder why he delayed sending the first note until after the body was found."

"This one is obviously murder. I'm calling the police." Ratherford said.

Ben agreed. "Did Kai Feng have any enemies?"

"He had me! He was stealing food from this shed and from the kitchen. I caught him at it last week and threatened to fire him if it happened again."

Ratherford repeated the story to the local sheriff when he arrived a few hours later. Guests were questioned at random but it was obvious to Ben that the sheriff—a flashy dandy who didn't even wear a gun—was only going through the motions. While Ben stood by, he confided to Ratherford, "It was probably one of them other Chinks in the kitchen."

"Aren't you going to investigate further?" Ratherford asked.

The sheriff, whose name was Royce, merely shrugged snidely. "You got Snow here to do your investigating. Call me in when you get a confession—or another body."

Except for the hotel owner, Linda Foster seemed the most concerned by Kai Feng's murder. "It was the same person who killed my husband, wasn't it?" she asked Ben in the dining room that evening, stopping at the table where he was eating alone.

"I think so. It seems to be."

"And Sheriff Royce was just as uncooperative as he was last week. Does he say this one is suicide, too?"

"No."

"Will you find the person that killed Harley?"

"Here, sit down for a moment," Ben said. She took the chair opposite him. "There's something I wanted to ask you earlier. Why didn't you accompany your husband's body back to San Francisco?"

"There's to be a memorial service—"

"*Why,* Mrs. Foster?"

Her eyes were downcast as she replied. "I suppose there's no point in trying to keep it secret any longer. I'm not Mrs. Foster. We were never married. The real Mrs. Foster is back in San Francisco."

"I see. Who else knows about this?"

"Only Reggie Cascourt. He suspected something a few weeks ago and I told him the truth."

Ben nodded. "I have to ask you a frank question, Mrs.—" He hesitated. "May I call you Linda?"

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"Certainly. My name is Linda Knight."

"Linda, are you having an illicit affair with Cascourt? Might he have killed Foster out of jealousy?"

She blushed at the question. "No. We're only good friends. His friendship may be one reason I stayed on here after Harley was killed, but it's been nothing more than that. He has never so much as kissed me."

"Thank you for telling me all this," Ben said. "It's a big help."

Later that evening he went in search of the card game Reno Hawkins had promised. But the men's bar was almost deserted. "Where is everyone?" he asked Reno.

"This killing has 'em all on edge. People are checking out of the hotel."

"No game tonight?"

"No game." He hesitated. "You saw the body, Snow. Is it true Kai Feng had a hangman's knot around his neck, like the one last week?"

Ben nodded. It was true. "Thirteen turns of the rope."

"I hear tell cowpokes sometimes ride on lynching parties. You ever lynch anyone?"

"No. I've prevented one or two in my time, though."

"Maybe you can prevent any more around here."

"I'm trying," Ben assured him.

There was a breeze off the ocean the following morning, but guests were still checking out of the hotel—their number had dwindled to a hand count. Ben was taking a walk around the grounds when he encountered Ratherford's daughter, Emily. "Hello, there!" she called to him. "How do you like working for my father?"

"I didn't have a very good first day of it."

"You mean Kai Feng? That wasn't your fault. I heard Sheriff Royce say he might have been killed hours before he was found, maybe even before you arrived."

"Thanks for telling me that."

"My father says you're a gunfighter. Is that true?"

They were walking along the high bluff overlooking the ocean. Down below, Ben could see fishermen with their nets in the morning surf. "I have that reputation, but it's hardly a fact. I'm a wanderer, really—a cowhand for hire. I'm good with a gun, and I suppose that's how the stories started."

"The wild west seems so far away here. Victorian England is closer somehow."

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"Yet you dress like a boy and drive a carriage like a man. That's hardly Victorian."

"I suppose it's my mother's influence. My father is the Victorian." She spotted a man walking ahead of them. "Come, I want you to meet someone."

Andrew McMillan proved to be a handsome young man dressed in a striped suit and vest, with a gold chain hanging from his pocket watch. "Andrew arrived just yesterday," Emily explained, introducing him to Ben. "He's a salesman and stops by here every few months."

McMillan passed Ben his calling card. "I travel for Boss Stoves, suppliers to the finest hotel and restaurant kitchens. If you're ever in the market—"

"Different line of work," Ben said, cutting him short.

"It's a busy time for me. There are new hotels opening up and down the coast, and they all need stoves."

"How long will you be here this time, Andrew?" Emily asked.

"Probably just until tomorrow. Will there be a card game in the bar tonight?"

Ben answered for her. "There wasn't one last night. Too many people checking out. The bartender said he was going to try for one tonight."

McMillan nodded. "Will you be there, Mr. Snow?"

"I might."

McMillan left them but Ben remained with Emily until they neared the hotel and her father called to her. "Emily, I want you to ride into town for some supplies! Take the wagon!"

"All right," she agreed readily.

When Ratherford had given her a list and sent her off, he said to Ben, "She's very young. Sometimes I think she's too friendly with our guests."

"And your employees?"

"And our employees. But I know I don't have to worry about you."

"That's right."

"Have you noticed anyone acting suspicious?"

"Not yet," Ben replied.

There was a card game in the men's bar that evening. Life at the Oceanfront Hotel had returned to normal. Ben sat in for a few hands and found himself playing with Reno Hawkins, Andrew McMillan,

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and three strangers. One was Oriental and Ben assumed he was another of the kitchen employees.

Ben lost two hands before he drew a good poker hand—a pair of kings and a pair of aces. He upped his bet as Reggie Cascourt came through the swinging doors to watch the action. After several more raises, McMillan drew two fresh cards. Ben had been playing in frontier saloons long enough to notice a bottom deal when he saw one. Andrew McMillan was cheating. When he lost to McMillan's three sevens, Ben dropped out. "That's enough for me," he said, throwing in his hand. "Want my spot, Cascourt?"

"No, I'll just watch."

Ben drifted over and ordered a beer from the bartender. He fully expected Reno to catch onto the cheating and halt the game, but when it went on with no interruption Ben finished his beer and left. He could understand now why Douglas Ratherford warned his daughter about some of the guests.

The following morning after breakfast, Ben helped Ratherford in his inventory of the kitchen supplies, to determine how much the unfortunate Kai Feng might have stolen. He assumed his presence was mainly to serve as a warning for the other employees that such thievery wouldn't be tolerated in the future. The Chinese who had been in the poker game the previous night was one of the spectators. His name was Wei Baqun and he was a friend of the murdered man. Ben tried to speak with him after the inventory was complete, but he seemed to know very little English.

In the afternoon, Linda Knight—or Linda Foster, as Ben still thought of her—strolled with Reggie Cascourt along the beach to the nearby amusement park. Ben watched them from the top of the bluff and decided to follow along. He hadn't visited the boardwalk area yet and it occurred to him that people must work there—drifters and carnival workers—who might not be above murder. Perhaps he and Ratherford had made a mistake in limiting their investigation to the hotel.

He watched Linda ride the merry-go-round and Reggie demonstrate his strength with a mallet by ringing a gong three times straight. They then ventured onto a small gravity railroad called a roller coaster, which Ben had never seen before. The passengers screamed during the brief ride and to Ben it looked more like torture than pleasure.

Cascourt spotted him as they left the roller coaster. "Hello, there. Taking an afternoon off?"

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"I just thought I'd look the place over," Ben said. "It's a short walk up the path to the hotel. Have either of you ever known any of the people from here to wander up there?"

Linda shook her head. "Never. I doubt if Mr. Ratherford would allow anyone off the premises to mingle with the guests."

Ben could see it would be an impossible task to question everyone who worked there. And it wasn't his job, anyway. His job was to protect the hotel guests. He decided to return to the hotel with Reggie and Linda.

They were halfway up the path when Ben spotted Douglas Ratherford at the top waiting for him. "What is it?" he called out.

"Come quickly, Mr. Snow! McMillan, the stove salesman, has been murdered!"

Andrew McMillan had died like the other two, with a hangman's noose around his neck, this time strung from a chandelier in the gentlemen's bar. Reno Hawkins had found the body when he opened the room at one o'clock. The note pinned to the dead man's sleeve was like the others:

NUMBER THREE FOR THE HANGMAN. MORE TO COME.

"When will this end?" Linda cried and Cascourt cradled her in his arms and led her away.

"What did Foster, Feng, and McMillan have in common?" Ben asked Douglas Ratherford.

"Nothing. Not a thing."

"McMillan sold stoves and Kai Feng worked in the kitchen."

"But to my knowledge neither of them knew Harley Foster. This was Foster's first visit to the Oceanfront, and he was already dead a week before McMillan arrived."

Ben puzzled over it. "Let's go to your office. I have another idea I want to try on you."

"I've already called Sheriff Royce on the phone. He's on his way," Ratherford said as they turned toward his office.

"I don't think Sheriff Royce is going to trap this hangman," Ben told him.

He followed Ratherford into his office behind the front desk and closed the door. "All right, Snow," Ratherford said. "What's your theory?"

"That only one of these three was intended as the real victim. Doesn't it strike you as odd that these last two had notes pinned to

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heir sleeves, but in the first killing the note came later? Almost as ın afterthought?"

"Well—"

"I think it *was* an afterthought. Suppose someone like Reggie Dascourt wanted Linda. He killed her husband, making it look like uicide. When people began to question the suicide idea, he sent you he note and then killed two other randomly selected victims so the vhole thing would look like the work of a madman."

"But I never questioned the suicide until I received the note," the ıotel man objected. "Nobody did except Linda."

"No," Ben admitted, and already another flaw in his theory had ccurred to him. Since Linda had confessed to Reggie that she and oster weren't married, he didn't need to kill Foster to free her. She vas already free and Reggie was the one person who knew it.

"I think you're barking up the wrong tree," Ratherford told Ben. Killing two innocent people to cover up a murder is a pretty crazy hing to do. How about this—Foster really did commit suicide and he note was sent to tie it in with the planned killings of Kai Feng ınd McMillan?"

Ben smiled. "And the motive for killing them? A fortune in jewels ıidden inside the kitchen stove?"

Douglas Ratherford sighed. "All right, where are we?"

"Nowhere," Ben admitted. "Three murders and we're nowhere. ,et Sheriff Royce do what he can. I'm no help to you. The killings ıave actually increased since you hired me. I'm leaving in the morn-ng."

Ratherford seemed saddened by his decision but he didn't argue. *I'll have a check ready for you. I still think you're a good man,* ;now. This simply isn't your sort of job."

When Royce arrived, Ben decided to stay out of the way. He went ıround back to the bandstand and pretended to be searching for omething.

That was when he found it, strictly by chance, beneath the band-tand steps where an evening breeze off the ocean must have blown t a week earlier: the first note.

ONE FOR THE HANGMAN. MORE TO COME.

The first message had come late, in the mail, for the simple reason hat the copy left with the body on the bandstand had blown away. ;o the killer had sent a duplicate.

The three killings had been tied together from the beginning. Chey were the work of a madman with a pattern all his own.

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But what was the pattern?
And who would be next?

Ben found Linda Knight alone after dinner and spoke with her in the lobby. Sheriff Royce had finally departed after hours of asking the same useless questions. He'd been interested in the fact that Reno and Ratherford possessed the only keys to the gentlemen's bar where the body was found, but it developed that a service door to the kitchen was never locked. Anyone could have entered that way during the night or early morning when the murder was committed.

With Linda, Ben's questions took a different tack. "I want you to think carefully and tell me if Harley Foster ever mentioned knowing Andrew McMillan."

"No, I'm sure he didn't."

"Did you ever see him talking with Kai Feng or any of the other kitchen employees?"

"No, never."

"What about the bandstand where he was found? Did it have any special meaning to him?"

"No. We liked to stroll out there sometimes after dinner to enjoy that fine view of the ocean at sunset. Once he kissed me when we were out there, but that was all."

"Kissed you?"

"Yes. Is anything wrong with that? Everyone thought we were married, remember."

Ben's eyes wandered across the lobby to the doorway of the men's bar and billiard room. Reno Hawkins had swung open the doors and called out, "We're back in business, gentlemen—the sheriff's finished in here."

Ben saw Wei Baqun from the kitchen staff and a few of the guests head in. Presently there was the familiar clack of billiard balls. He imagined a poker game would soon be in progress, too.

"My God!" he gasped.

"What is it?" Linda asked.

"I need to send a telegram," he told her, and hurried off to the front desk. Sending telegraphed messages across the country wasn't something Ben ordinarily did, but the circumstances were far from ordinary.

The desk clerk put him through to the telegraph office by phone and Ben passed on the message he wanted to send. "Just this one question?" the clerk asked.

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"That's all. Tell them I need a reply immediately."

"Yes, sir. Who should I charge this to?"

"The Oceanfront Hotel."

When he turned around, Ben saw that Reggie Cascourt was chatting with Linda. Reggie nodded to Ben and headed in the direction of the hotel veranda. As Ben returned to Linda's side, she asked, "Did you send your telegram?"

Ben nodded. "I only hope there's a quick reply. It's late on the East Coast. I telegraphed a reporter I know at *The New York Times*. It's a morning newspaper, so he should still be at his desk."

"Does this have anything to do with the murders?"

Before Ben could reply, they were joined by Reno Hawkins. He was wearing cowboy boots and a fancy shirt with leather fringe. "We're getting a game together if you're interested, Mr. Snow."

"Not tonight, thanks."

"Mr. Ratherford says you might be leaving in the morning."

"I hope to if I can finish up my business tonight."

Outside, the sun had set and it was growing dark. Though he'd sent his telegram only five minutes ago, Ben was already growing impatient for a reply.

"What was that?" Linda asked suddenly. "It sounded like a girl's scream!"

Then it came again, from outside, and they all heard it. Ben ran toward the veranda, with the others following. Emily stood there, pointing across the lawn at the bandstand. "It's Mr. Cascourt!" she sobbed. "He—he—"

Ben saw the figure jerking at the end of the rope, dangling from the bandstand roof as Harley Foster must have done a week earlier. He vaulted the veranda railing, pulling a jackknife from his back pocket as he ran. Then he was up on the bandstand railing, trying to support Cascourt's body as he cut through the rope.

Emily was still screaming and he was aware of her father running toward them with Reno and Linda. The kitchen staff and other guests had joined them by the time the strands of rope separated. Ben lowered Reggie Cascourt into their waiting arms. "I think he's still alive," he gasped, jumping down to the bandstand floor.

A note pinned to Cascourt's sleeve read:

NUMBER FOUR FOR THE HANGMAN. NO MORE AFTER THIS.

"It's the end," Emily whispered, reading the note. "No more."

Linda was on her knees by Cascourt, trying to force life into him. "Breathe, Reggie! Try to breathe!"

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"Did you see who did it?" Ratherford asked his daughter.

"No, not really—he just seemed to step off the railing with tha rope around his neck. I didn't see anyone with him."

"There was no one," Ben verified. "He was alone."

"Alone! How is that possible? How do you know?"

Ben got to his feet and looked down at the man on the ground The noose had been removed from Cascourt's neck and he was con scious enough to run a hand over the red welt it had left on hi throat. "Because Reggie Cascourt is the Hangman. He killed thre people and he just tried to kill himself."

As his strength returned, Cascourt's insane rage boiled over anc he had to be restrained. Sheriff Royce had him transported unde guard to the hospital before sitting down to listen to Ben's expla nation. They were seated in the library along with Douglas Rath erford, Emily, and Linda Knight.

"What did they have in common?" Ben began. "Even to a crazec mind bent on murder, Harley Foster, Kai Feng, and Andrew McMillan had to stand out from all the other employees and guests at the Oceanfront Hotel. How? While they were here, *each one committed a crime.*"

"Crime?" Ratherford repeated. "What crime? Kai Feng stole fooc from the storage shed, but what crimes did the others commit?"

"Kai Feng stole food from the storage shed, the very place in which he was hanged. Andrew McMillan cheated at cards—I saw him dc it myself last night in the men's bar, the place where *he* was hanged.'

"And Harley?" Linda asked. "What did Harley do?"

"I'm sorry, Linda. Harley Foster committed adultery. That's still a crime in most states, even though it's rarely prosecuted. He kissed you on the bandstand, and to Cascourt's twisted mind that was evidence of adultery, so Foster had to die on the bandstand. Tonight there was only one other criminal he knew left at Oceanfront, and that was Cascourt himself. He'd committed three murders, the first of them at the bandstand, so he chose to hang himself there."

Emily broke the silence with another question. "Even guessing the motive, how could you know Cascourt was the killer?"

"The Hangman had to know about those three crimes—the adultery, the food thefts, and the cheating at cards. Anyone might have seen Kai Feng looting the storage shed, but Cascourt was watching the game last night when McMillan cheated—he saw it, the same as I did. But how could the Hangman know about Foster's adultery?

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Linda told me only one other person knew she wasn't Foster's wife—Cascourt. Therefore, only Cascourt and Linda herself had the knowledge to be the Hangman. Could it have been Linda? No. She'd hardly have the strength to lift her victims into the noose, even after knocking them unconscious. This afternoon I saw that Cascourt was a strong man. He rang the bell several times with a mallet at the amusement park. Also, it was impossible for Linda to have observed Andrew McMillan cheating at cards—the games took place in the gentlemen's bar, where women are forbidden to enter."

"I might have seen him cheating elsewhere," she suggested.

"McMillan was hanged from a chandelier in the bar because that's where the Hangman saw the crime committed. The Hangman had to be a man."

Reno Hawkins entered the library and handed a message to Ben. "This telegram just arrived for you from New York."

Ben glanced at the message. It read: HOW'S CALIFORNIA? ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION IS REG CASCOURT.

Ben handed the telegram to the sheriff. "Cascourt was from New York, and I read in the newspaper that New York State began using the electric chair this week to execute criminals. I took a chance and asked a reporter friend a question. This is his answer."

"Damn it, Snow, what was your question?"

" 'Who was the legal hangman for the State of New York,' " Ben said. "Cascourt was the man the electric chair there put out of a job."

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first publication in the U.S.

The books of the late author of romantic fiction, Zenobia Hatt, didn't sell that well, but she was prolific and kept producing them. In her will, she decreed that the future profits from her writing should go into a trust fund to pay for her adored dogs to be kept in style at some ripoff place in Hampstead. The residue was to be awarded annually as a literary prize—the Zenobia Hatt Prize—for the best published work of fiction that featured a Pomeranian as one of the main characters. Which limited the competition somewhat . . .

THE ZENOBIA HATT PRIZE

by PETER LOVESEY

Rosebud Books
Volumes of Romance
Battersea Bridge Road
London SW11
12th May

Dearest Honeypot,

Have you gone into hiding? My telephonist has a sore finger from trying your number, and your Grizzly Bear is going spare. Can't work, can't think of anything else. Horrid fears that his Honeypot has been stolen by some other bear and taken to another part of the forest.

Put him out of his misery, won't you, and tell him it isn't true? The weekend in Brighton wasn't so disappointing as all that, was it? The trouble with this bear is that he's too excitable when he gets the chance of Honey, but he remains hugginglyaffectionate. He passionately wants another chance to prove it.

Do pick up the blower and comfort your fretful

Grizzly

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P.S. Are you writing anything at present? A brilliant opportunity has cropped up. Couldn't possibly make Honeypot any sweeter, but could guarantee to make her infinitely richer.

310 Arch Street
Earls Court
SW5
Sunday afternoon

Dear Frank (I'd rather drop the nursery names, if you don't mind),

As you see, I've moved from Fulham. Your letter was sent on. Take a deep breath and pour yourself a double scotch, Frank. I'm living with a guy called Tristram. He's my age and could pass for my twin brother and we have so much in common that I can hardly believe it's true. We both adore Status Quo, Martin Amis, Chinese takeaways, Steve Bell, Porsches, Spielberg, Daley Thompson, goose-down duvets, and so much else it would take the rest of today and next week to list it. Tristram went to public school (Radley) and Sussex University. He has a degree in American Studies and he's terribly high-powered. He knows Milton Friedman and John Irving and masses of people who come up on the box. I know you'll understand when I say that I'm totally committed to Tristram now.

Pause for you to top up the scotch.

Frank, I want you to know that this has nothing to do with what happened, or didn't quite happen, that Saturday night in Brighton. I blame that bottle of Asti. We should have stayed on g. and t. Whatever, no hard feelings, okay?

I'm not sure if you still feel the same about the business opportunity you mentioned, but I *am* quite intrigued, as a matter of fact. Yes, I've been doing some writing—tinkering away at a novel about the women's movement, the first of a five-book saga, actually—but Tristram and I are both on social security, so I wouldn't mind putting the novel on one side if there's cash on tap now. But I must make it clear that it's my writing talent, such as it is, that's up for grabs, and nothing else. Putting it another way, Frank darling, I'm open to advances in pounds sterling.

We don't have a phone yet, and it gets expensive using pay-phones, so be a darling and write by return.

Be kind to me.
Luv,
Felicity

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Rosebud Books
Volumes of Romance
23 May

Dear Felicity,

You may wonder why it took me so long to answer your letter. On the other hand, you may wonder that I bothered to answer it at all. I need hardly say that I am deeply hurt. For me, the age difference between us was never an impediment and I rashly imagined you felt the same way. You gave me no reason to suppose there was anyone else in your life. You appeared to enjoy our evenings together. True, I caught you closing your eyes at the proms from time to time, but I took it that you were transported by the music. You always seemed to revive in time for our suppers in the trattoria. I find myself putting a cynical construction on everything now.

I suppose I must accept that I was just a meal-ticket, or a sugar-daddy, or whatever cruel phrase is currently in vogue for it.

As to that literary project I happened to mention, I shall obviously look elsewhere. The work required is undemanding and I daresay I shall have no difficulty finding an author willing to make a six-figure sum for a short children's book.

You may keep my LP of the Enigma Variations. To listen to it ever again would be too distressful.

Your former friend,
Franklin

310 Arch Street
SW5
Wednesday morning

Grizzly Darling!

What a wild, ferocious bear you were last night! Honeypot has never felt so stirred.

When I arrived with the Elgar and the Mateus rosé, I honestly meant to say sorry and a civilized goodbye. You're so masterful!

If you still mean what you said (and if you don't I shall throw myself under a train), could you come with the van sometime between six-thirty and seven on Friday evening? Tristram will be at his karate class and it will avoid a scene that might otherwise be too hairy for us all. I haven't much stuff to move out, darling. One trip will be enough, I'm sure.

Hugs and kisses,
Your Felicity

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My own dearest Tristram,

Please, darling, before you do anything else, read this to the end. It's terribly important to our relationship that you understand what I have done, and why.

I've moved out. I'm going to stay with Frank, that doddery old publisher guy I told you about. Before you blow your top, Tris, hear me out. I've agonized over this for days. Darling, you know I wouldn't walk out on you without a copper-bottomed reason. Frank means nothing to me. He's a dingbat: pathetic, ugly, flabby, but—and this is the point—he knows a way to make me fabulously rich. I mean stinking rich, Tris. We're talking telephone numbers. And for what? For some books he wants me to write. He hasn't given me all the details yet. He's boxing clever until I move in with him, which is part of the deal, but I understand it's only a children's book he wants. I can finish it in a matter of days if I pull out all the stops, and then I'll be off like a bunny, sweetheart.

He insisted that I go and live in his house in the backwoods of Surrey while I'm writing the thing. Isn't it a bore? I'm not giving you the address because I know what you'll do. You'll be down there kicking in the door, and who could blame you? But just pause to think. If I pass up this opportunity, what sort of future do you and I have? I mean, I *know* it's terrific being together, but what prospect is there of ever getting out of this damp slum? I've had enough, Tris, and so have you. Admit it.

I can almost hear you say I'm selling myself, and I suppose I am if I'm honest, but, let's face it, I spent a weekend with Frank in Brighton before I met you. It's not as if he's a total stranger. And if I am selling myself, what a price!

Which is why I'm asking you to keep your cool and try to understand that this is the best chance we've got. Just a short interval, darling, and then we can really start to live.

There won't be a minute when you're out of my thoughts, lover.

I'll write again soon.
Be patient, darling!
Ever your Felicity

This dreary pad in Surrey
Saturday night

Dearest Tristram,

Has it been only a week? It feels like *months*. A life sentence with hard labor, and I've been doing plenty of that. Writing, I mean. Non-

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stop. The reason I can do so much is that I know every word, every letter I write is worth pounds and pounds. Guaranteed. It's crazy, but it's true. I'm onto a winner, Tris. You see, Frank—he's my publisher friend—has told me exactly how this is going to work, and he's right. It can't miss. He and I are going to split—wait for it—half a million dollars!

For a kids' book?

Yes!

Scrape yourself off the floor and I'll tell you how this miracle works.

You know that Frank is the chairman of Rosebud Books, who publish romance fiction, and before you knock it remember that my only published work, *Desire Me Do,* paid for our new telly, among other things. Frank's outfit isn't exactly Mills & Boon, but he helps beginners like me to get started and I daresay it makes life more tolerable for a few thousand readers of the things.

One of Frank's regular writers was an eccentric old biddy called Zenobia Hatt. That was her real name, believe it or not. I'm using the past tense because she died four or five years ago, before I got to know Frank. Apparently she was prolific. Her books didn't sell all that well, but she kept producing them. And she expected to see them in the shops. Every time she walked into a supermarket and spotted a display of paperbacks, she checked to see if her latest was among them. If it wasn't, she made a beeline for Rosebud Books to tear a strip off Frank. She was always tearing strips off Frank. Even if the book was in the shop, something about it would upset her, like the cover design, or the quality of paper they were using. I don't know why he continued to publish her, but he did. She always appeared with her two dogs in tow. They were Pomeranians. If you think I'm rabbiting on about nothing important, you're making a big mistake. This *is* important.

Do you know about Pomeranians? They're toy dogs. Funny little beggars with enormous ruffs, neat faces, and tiny legs. They come in most colors. You know how some old ladies are with dogs? Zenobia doted on hers.

Well, like I said, she died, and this is the important bit, Tristy. In her will, she left the house and everything she had to be divided among her relatives. That is, except any future income from her books. You get royalties trickling in long after a book is published, you see. Zenobia decreed that the future profits from her writing

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should go into a trust fund to pay for her dogs to be kept in style at some ripoff place in Hampstead that caters for pampered pets who have come into money. The residue was to be awarded annually as a literary prize: the Zenobia Hatt Prize.

Nice idea, right? The snag was that Zenobia wasn't really in the Barbara Cartland class as a bestselling writer. The royalties paid the fees at the dogs' home for a couple of years and then the Pommies were put down. There was never any residue, so the prize was never awarded.

End of story? Not quite. Cop this, love.

A couple of months ago, Frank had a phone call from California. Some film producer was asking about the rights to a Rosebud book called *Michaela and the Mount,* by—you guessed—Zenobia Hatt! It was a cheap romance she published years ago—so long ago, in fact, that it was out of print, so Frank wouldn't make a penny out of any deal. Don't ask me why, but this book is reckoned to be the perfect vehicle for some busty starlet they reckon is the next Madonna.

Tris, darling, they bought it for half a million bucks! The money goes into the trust, and by the terms of Zenobia's will it has to be offered as the prize for 1987. The lot. The doggies aren't on the payroll any more, so every silver dollar is up for grabs. And who do you think is going to win?

Shall I tell you how? The point is that Zenobia didn't offer her money for any common or garden novel. She had very clear ideas about the sort of book she wanted to encourage. She had it written into her will that the prize should go to the best published work of fiction that featured a Pomeranian as one of the main characters. As you can imagine, that limits the competition somewhat.

When Frank cottoned onto this, he did some quick thinking. Animal stories don't usually feature on the Rosebud list, but he reckoned he could stretch a point and commission a book for kids featuring Tom the Pom that he'd rush through before the end of the year to scoop the prize. He'd go fifty-fifty with the writer, and that's me, sweetheart. I've signed an agreement and payday will be sometime in January, when the trustees award the prize. It's as simple as that. No one else has time to get a book out, because the news hasn't broken yet, and won't until the film deal is finalized. You know what American lawyers are like. Well, perhaps you don't, but the trustees expect to sign the contract in October or November. *Tom the Pom* will hit the shops in time for Christmas and it doesn't

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matter a brass farthing how many it sells, because it's certain to clean up half a million bucks.

That's the story so far, my love. Naturally I can't wait to finish *my* story and hand it over. Then there'll be nothing to keep me here. I hope to see you Friday at the latest, and what a reunion that will be!

Luv you,
Felicity

Same Place, Unfortunately
Thursday

Tris, darling,

I'm not going to make it by tomorrow. I showed Frank what I've written so far and he wants some changes, some of them pretty drastic. I tried pointing out that it didn't really matter if the writing was sloppy in places, so long as I finished the flaming book and it got into print before the end of the year, but he came over all high and mighty and sounded off about standards and the reputation of his house. I wondered what on earth his house had to do with it until I discovered he was talking about Rosebud Books, his publishing house. He says he doesn't want an inferior book to carry his imprint, especially as *Tom the Pom* is certain to get a lot of attention when it wins. I suppose he has a point.

So it's back to the keyboard to hammer out some revisions. What a drag!

I suppose Monday or Tuesday would be a realistic estimate.

Impatiently,
Luv,
Felicity

Wednesday

Oh, Tris,

I'm so depressed! I've had the mother and father of a row with Frank. I finished the book yesterday, with all the changes he wanted. He read it last night. He wasn't exactly over the moon, but he agreed it couldn't wait any longer so he would hand it over to his sub-editor. I said fine, and would he kindly drop me and my baggage at the flat on his way to the office. Tris, he looked at me as if I was crazy. He said we had an agreement. I said certainly we had, and I'd fulfilled my side of it by finishing the book, now I was ready to go home.

Whereupon he deluged me with a load of gush about how it was

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much more than a publishing agreement to him. He wouldn't have asked me to write the book if he hadn't believed I was willing to move in with him. I meant more to him than all the money and if I walked out on him now he would drop the typescript in the Thames.

Tris, I'm sure he means it. He knows I need the money and he's going to keep me here like a hostage until the book is in the shops. He could cancel it at any stage up to then. I'll be here for *months*.

There's no way out that I can see. You and I are just going to have to be patient. The day the book is published, I'll be free. And ready to collect my share of the prize. Let's go skiing in February, shall we? And what sort of car shall we buy? We can have that Porsche. One each, if we want it. If we both look forward to next year, perhaps we can get through. We *must* get through.

Tris, don't try and trace me here, darling. It would be too painful for us both.

I'm thinking of you constantly.
Your soon-to-be-rich but sorry-to-be-here
Felicity

As Before
1 August

Tris, my love,

Did you wonder if I was ever going to write again? Are you starting to doubt my existence? Dear God, I hope not. The reason it has been so long is that I get dreadfully depressed. I've written any number of letters and destroyed them when I read them through a second time. It's no good for me to wallow in self-pity, and it certainly won't do much for you.

So this time I'll be positive. Another month begins today. For me, another milestone. I've endured ten weeks now and I'm still looking at my watch all day long.

I expect you'd like to know how I pass my days. I get up around nine, after he's left for work. Breakfast (half a grapefruit, coffee, and toast), then a walk if it's fine. Without giving anything away—and I won't, so don't look for clues—there are some beautiful walks through the woods here. I see squirrels every day and sometimes deer. Often I collect enough mushrooms to have on toast for lunch, or if I'm really energetic I might put them into a quiche. The rest of the morning and most of the afternoon is devoted to my writing. The novel, I mean. It's slow work, but it's good stuff, Tris, a sight better than *Tom the Pom,* which is going to make so much

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more money. Crazy. (*T. the P.* was in proof four weeks ago, by the way, and this is the good news: LIBERATION DAY is earlier than I dared to hope—September 30th.) Later in the afternoon I might do some reading. The trouble is that the only books here are Rosebud Romances—which depress me even when they're sufficiently well written to be readable—and boring nonfiction on hunting, shooting, and fishing that he only keeps for the leather bindings.

Around six, I get something out of the freezer for the evening meal. He comes down about seven and that's all I'm going to say about my day. I stop living then.

Perhaps you wonder why I don't slip away to London during the day to see you. Tris, I've often thought of it. I know that I couldn't bear to come back here if I did. He'd stop publication of the book and you and I would have endured all this for nothing. No, I must hold out here.

Less than two months to go!
Love
Felicity

The Same
19th August

Tris darling,

I have a horrid feeling that Frank suspects something. It's like this. Ever since he moved me here, he's assumed that it's for keeps. He constantly talks about his future as if I'm part of it. Like he talks about the two of us (him and me) taking trips on the *Concorde* or the *Orient Express* when we've got our hands on the Zenobia Hatt Prize. Naturally I go along with this, letting him think I can't imagine anything more blissful than sharing the rest of my life with him and half a million bucks.

Up to now, I'm sure he's believed me. Up to last night, anyway. Then, out of the blue, he mentioned you, Tris. I don't think either of us have spoken your name since he brought me here. He asked me if I'd been in touch with you, and of course I denied it. Just to sound more convincing, I went a bit further and said I'd forgotten all about you.

Frank went on to say that he only happened to speak of you because by chance he was driving along Arch Street at lunchtime yesterday and he saw a tall, dark guy in leathers coming out of number 310 with his arm around a strikingly good-looking redhead. I must admit he caught me off guard for a moment. I must have

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looked concerned, because he took me up on it at once and asked why I'd gone so pale.

I see now that it was a shabby, underhand trick to test my reactions. I can't fathom how he knows that you go in for leathers, because I've never told him, but I'm sure of one thing, and that's that you wouldn't cheat on me while I'm in purgatory here.

If Frank wants a battle of wits, he'll find I'm more than a match for him. I think last night was just a try-on, but I'm taking no chances. I'll make sure no one sees me posting this.

I've discovered a way of making my walks more interesting. Among those boring old books on blood sports in the library, I found an illustrated guide on the fungi of Great Britain. I take it with me and try and identify the different species along the paths. I'm doing quite well so far, with four different sorts of toadstools as well as the mushrooms I have for lunch.

Six weeks today and we'll be together, Tris. For keeps.

I'll write when I can.
Miss you so much.
Felicity

Still Holed-Up Here
September 10th

Well, Tris, my darling,

It's a day for celebration. I've actually had a copy of *Tom the Pom* in my hands! The printers have delivered it on time. But before you uncork the champagne, let me explain that this still isn't publication day. That remains the same—September 30th. They send the books out to the shops ready for the big day, but no one is supposed to sell them before then. In theory, Frank could cancel the publication, call them back, and burn them all, and I actually believe he would if he knew I was planning to give him the elbow once I've qualified for the prize. The book strikes me as pretty abysmal now that I've had a chance to read it again. However, they've dressed it up in a shiny laminated cover with cute illustrations by some artist (who won't have any claim on the prize, incidentally, because it's awarded to the writer) and I expect they'll sell a few hundred.

I'm glad to have something to give me a boost, because Frank has been driving me mad. He keeps wanting assurances that I'm committed to him for life, and he constantly paws me. I think he senses that I find it disagreeable, and that makes him even more persistent. He often mentions you now, and that redhead he is supposed to have

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seen you with. It's as if he senses what's in my mind and wants me to break down and admit it.

Sometimes I feel so angry that I'd like to stop him getting *any* of the prize, like the poms that were put down before they could come into a fortune. You and I would be twice as well off then.

I do my best to divert myself on my walks, which I'm now taking morning and afternoon, in all weathers. I'm becoming quite an expert on fungi. I've found and identified several more species, including *Amanita Phalloides*, known commonly as the Death Cap or the Destroying Angel. Not to be confused with the mushroom, as it is fatal if eaten. There's a small crop of them under an oak only five minutes from here. Only three weeks now, my love!

Felicity

Here, but not for much longer
One day to Liberation!

Darling Tristram,

By the time you get this, it will be Publication Day and I will have freed myself from Frank forever. He has become quite insufferable. I've come to a momentous decision. It's been forced on me partly because I'm desperately frightened to tell him that I'm leaving him. I don't want the confrontation, and I know that if I just walk out he'll track me down. I don't ever want to see him again. He gives me the creeps. And I feel bitter that he's due to collect such a large share of the prize. It's supposed to go to the writer, Tris, and I was the one who slogged it out for days inventing a story. Frank didn't do a damn thing except hand it to the printer.

I want you to do something for me, Tris. Please, darling, burn every one of the letters I wrote you. I don't want anyone to know I was ever here. *Make sure you do this.*

Trust me, whatever happens, because I love you. —Felicity

6:30

Dear Grizzly,

Quiche in the oven.
Honeypot

Sydney, Australia
25th April

Dear Felicity,

I'm not sure whether you're permitted to receive letters in prison,

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particularly letters from former boy friends. Maybe you don't want to hear from me, anyway, but I think I owe you some kind of explanation. If it upsets you, well, you've got thirty years to get over it.

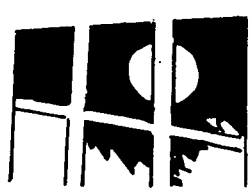
I followed your trial in the Aussie papers. They covered it quite fully in the tabloids. Apparently, murder by poisoning is still a good paper-seller. They don't have death-cap toadstools here, but there are other kinds of poisonous fungi that I suppose one could disguise in a quiche. The reports I read suggested that you didn't know it would take up to a week for Frank to die. Books on fungi don't always go into that sort of detail. I wondered why they couldn't save him by washing out his stomach or something, but apparently the toxins are absorbed before the first effects appear. Looking at it from his point of view, at least he lived long enough to tell his suspicions to the police.

You'll notice I haven't given an address above. That isn't from secrecy. It's because I'm on a cruise around the world. Some months ago I met this gorgeous redhead called Imogen. To be brutally honest, she moved in with me at Earl's Court after you went to live with Frank. I got lonely, Fel, and I figured you had company, so why shouldn't I?

Imogen is one of those quiet girls who are capable of surprising you. I didn't know she found a bunch of your letters to me and secretly read them. I didn't know she had any talent as a children's writer until last January, when she was announced as the winner of the Zenobia Hatt Prize. I don't suppose you had a chance to see the press reports. The trustees received only two entries. Imogen's *One Hundred and Two Pomeranians*, which she published privately at her own expense in December, was adjudged to be closest to the spirit of the award.

No hard feelings? The cash wouldn't have been much use to you, would it?

Cheers, love,
Tristram



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Annette first met Wendel Harmon two years ago when he brought in twenty pounds of dress slacks and white shirts. That was the day Wendel fell in love with her eyes. They could have come fresh off the boat from Italy—dark and deep, a window to her soul. Before she had written out a receipt, he suggested, in that sales-winning personality of his, that they have lunch. Their conversation was colored with just enough unhappiness so that Wendel jokingly suggested they run off together . . .

SOMEWHERE ELSE

by DAVID PIERCE

Was it absolutely necessary for a grave to be six feet deep? Wendel Harmon was wondering with each shovelful of earth. The night was hot and sticky and the full moon transformed his back yard into a stage. A good night for a murder, he thought crazily, and then shook his head. He had planned this night for several months and he couldn't let it all unravel now.

The hardest part had been the waiting. After he actually had the pillow over his wife's face and held it there for at least a half hour, everything seemed to go more smoothly than he had anticipated. The cloying smell of her body powder had nearly gagged him, but he held fast. Afterward, he carried Alice's lifeless body downstairs and packed her neatly into one of the big U-Haul boxes in the living room and stuffed a couple of sheets in beside her on either side as if she were fine china.

Then he had stepped out onto the back porch and filled his lungs with fresh air. The neighbors were asleep and the night was still, so he pulled a brand-new shovel out from under the house and began digging in the back corner of the yard, along the fence row.

Alice had unknowingly done her part to help Wendel cover his tracks. He had talked her into packing things like clothing in separate boxes and marking them His and Hers so that when the Salvation Army showed up, he'd simply separate the His from the Hers and the last of Alice would be gone as easily as that.

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Wendel seemed to relax now with every shovelful, realizing things were going as planned. Tomorrow he would load up all his possessions, pick up Annette, and take three days to drive across the country to California, where he'd move into a new house with his new wife and start his new job.

Wendel enjoyed selling. He sold big trucks, tractor-trailer rigs where one sale could easily cover two months' living expenses. And he was a damned good salesman. Month after month, he had won all kinds of prizes for being the top salesman, prizes like a set of golf clubs, a gas grill, even a grandfather clock. It was these praiseworthy credentials that had helped him to land the new job in sunny California.

Six months earlier, Wendel had gotten his hands on a trade journal and turned to the C section for California. Southern Cal always seemed like a dream place to Wendel, so he figured he'd go for it. Annette was all for it, too. He applied for a sales position with a multimillion-dollar marina and met with a representative making rounds in his part of the country. They liked what they saw and hired him. "California here we come!" Wendel sang, and for the short time remaining, Alice was almost bearable to live with. But he'd have to break away nice and clean from her, he decided—and for good, or she'd track him down and sap him for everything he had.

He rented the U-Haul truck using a fake I.D. and address so there'd be no chance to trace him in case something should be found, made arrangements for the Salvation Army to come the morning of moving day, and bought a brand-new shovel.

He was up past his thighs in the hurried grave. Deep enough. Throw plenty of dirt over it, pile up a few rocks in the corner by the fence row, no one would ever notice. He had met the buyers of his house once. They were an older couple who'd probably use the swing on the front porch more than they ever would the back yard.

Wendel hurried back inside. U-Haul boxes, stacked up like giant toy blocks—some packed, others empty—were silhouetted by the dim moonlight that seeped around the draperies. The shadows were dark, mysterious monoliths that sat as still and austere as a courtroom judge.

Wendel took a few steps and racked his shin on the coffee table. He knelt and held his knee close to him until the sharpness of the pain subsided to a dull, throbbing ache. But he dared not turn on the light. Mr. Reynolds next door might be making his way into the

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kitchen for his midnight sandwich or cookies and peek out his window and see Wendel's living-room light on. Maybe he'd pass it of at the time, but then before he went back upstairs to bed he'd likely peek out one more time, remembering the light, and see Wende planting his wife in the back yard. Just rub your shin and keep groping, Wendel told himself.

He found the long box he'd settled his wife in, punched out the perforated handles on either side, and dragged the box out the back door and across the yard to the newly dug grave. He wrestled the box into the hole and covered it over with a foot of dirt and rocks just like he'd pictured in his mind. Then he went back into the house took a shower, and slept as soundly as a baby.

George and Mabel Akers had lived in the same farmhouse for over forty years. In that house they had raised a family and had grown old together. George finally decided, when he saw what a toll the daily farm chores were taking on Mabel and himself, to buy a small frame house in a friendly subdivision close to town, with just enough house and yard to keep them busy but not kill them.

When they saw Wendel and Alice's home, they fell in love with it. It was a white frame with black shutters and red flower boxes under the two bay windows. The back yard was fenced in and there was a big front porch with a swing made just for retired folks.

Later that same week, George made a few trips into town. One night he secretly slipped the front-door key of their new home into a glass of wine and toasted with Mabel, who was rightfully confused by the gesture. But when the big round Yale key broke the surface of the wine, she squealed with delight. George only nodded and grinned, receiving his hugs and kisses dutifully.

Annette would have done about anything to get away from the laundromat where she was the sole worker for the bundle service they advertised on the front marquee: WE DO IT ALL .50 A POUND. She was tired of sorting, washing, drying, and folding, tired of the wet the heat, and the incessant *thumpthumpthump* of the spin cycle.

She first met Wendel Harmon two years ago when he brought in twenty pounds of slacks and white shirts. That was the day Wendel fell in love with her eyes. They could have come fresh off the boat from Italy—dark and deep, a window to her soul. He could tell right away she was attracted to him. Before she had written out a receipt he suggested, in that sales-winning personality of his, that they

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have lunch. Their conversation was colored with just enough unhappiness so that Wendel jokingly suggested they run off together. She said yes, seriously.

They had seen each other for over two months before Annette learned he was married. Wendel promised her he and Alice were in the throes of divorce and as soon as some financial obligations were met he'd be gone.

Supposedly the arrangements had been made and they were performing a mutual parting of ways the night he put a pillow over Alice's face. If the grandfather clock he had won had not already been packed and bedsheets stuffed around the works, it would have struck twelve the moment he covered her face with the feather pillow and chimed the half hour as he lifted it.

Mabel Akers hadn't been so excited in a long time. George had given her $200 cash and dropped her off at Wal-Mart to buy odds and ends for their new house.

She shopped with as much discrimination as possible, passing over things she had always believed she wanted but now that she had the money and opportunity decided against, like a set of blue glasses she realized would look cheap with her antique china and a Bissell sweeper she had seen women on TV use. And after forty years of Christmas and Mother's Day, she had plenty of towels and potholders.

Instead, she tried to be more practical. She purchased some blue shower curtains, a blue toilet-tank set, and some daisy stickers that stuck to the tub bottom and were supposed to keep you from slipping. She bought a new welcome mat for the front porch (one with a big rainbow-colored bass on it for George's sake), some cleaning supplies, and a half dozen climbing rose bushes that were packed into a bargain bin marked SPRINGTIME SALE/2 FOR $6. They were all pruned closely and looked like gnarled hands protruding from bags of dirt. She read the instructions on the back for planting even though she'd planted hundreds over the years. (Dig a hole at least 12 inches deep.) They'd be perfect along that unsightly fence row.

When moving day came, Wendel hired some extra backs from Temporary Time and they had the truck loaded in a few hours. Shortly after noon, he picked up Annette, packed in her few belongings, and they headed West. Before they had gone too far, Wendel had to stop at a service station. Annette teasingly rolled her

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imported eyes at the delay, but Wendel couldn't go any farther unti he washed the smell of Alice's body powder off his hands.

It took George and Mabel nearly four days to get all their antique arranged. (Everything they owned had reached antique status a sometime during their marriage.) The next thing Mabel wanted t do was to clean out the cluttered fence row and plant her climbin rose bushes.

As she dug with a small pointed shovel to set the roses deep George stepped out onto the back porch and called to her. "Just fine," she answered. "This is going to be beautiful." She scratched her nos with the back of her hand and left a smudge of dirt on the tip. Wher the point of her shovel hit the heavy-duty-cardboard box buried onl a few inches below the soil, she stopped. Odd, she thought. She trie again, but the ground seemed too spongy.

Wendel counted the twenty-third convertible in the last half hou before allowing himself to believe he was finally in sunny Southern California. His office was a small, three-walled cubicle—two walls on wheels and the third a glass storefront that overlooked a lot filled with spanking-new boats of every kind.

He and Annette were so exhausted they slept on the floor. Rather than unpack the next morning, he bought a new suit and hired help from Man Power to come over later in the morning to unload the truck. Annette would show them where to put the furniture. He spent most of the morning touring the marina with his new boss, meeting fellow salesmen, organizing his desk, and counting convertibles.

He had a stack of books and pamphlets on Johnson, Evinrude, Mercury, and other boat manufacturers he'd have to cram before he went into the sales rotation in two days, though he still found it hard to believe that boats he would sell one day would be floating in the Pacific the next.

Mabel Akers began scooping away big handfuls of dirt, realizing something had been buried. She had read stories in *Reader's Digest* about new homeowners unearthing great treasures the previous eccentric owner had buried and then taken the secret of to the grave. She called for George and together they soon uncovered a large rectangular box with an orange U-Haul printed across the top.

George, as excited as Mabel, explored the edges blindly with his

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ands. Mabel stepped back, resting on her shovel. Her heart was ounding. George straddled the hole and grasped each side of the d and wiggled it off.

They gasped simultaneously.

The ringing was growing louder. It was still a muffled wailing, ke the screams of a dying woman. Then there was no mistaking . The ringing was the siren of police cars. One? Two? A dozen? Vhat was he doing? he scolded himself—people broke the law in alifornia, too. Wendel tried to ignore the sirens and pretended to ıumb through an Evinrude accessory catalogue, which he refused) pull down from his face even when he heard the piercing noise f sirens and the tearing screech of tires on the pavement outside is window.

Finally, he lowered the book, peering over the top edge at three olice cars nosed into the parking lot, lights strobing. Some police- ıen knelt by the cars, guns drawn, and others charged the front ntrance, their guns held in various stages of alert.

Through the glare of the window he saw Annette step out of one f the squad cars. A blanket was draped over her shoulders, the kind aramedics drape over victims of shock. Her eyes were dark and ormy—and in them Wendel could read the desire to be somewhere lse.

His mind raced, scanning every move he'd made in the last few ıonths—the truck, the fake I.D., the new job, the buried wife. He ouldn't think of a single mistake.

George stepped back from the hole and held Mabel. She let her ıovel fall and hugged George around the waist, drawing close to im. Then she pushed away and punched him playfully. "George, this another of your tricks? Like the key in the wine?"

George shook his head, bewildered.

"Come on, George," Mabel demanded. She looked at the open box gain. Bedsheets were packed in tightly to prevent any moving parts om jostling about. "Who else would do this? Why would anyone ant to bury a grandfather clock?"

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM G. TAPPLY

William G. Tapply's sixth mystery about Boston attorney Bradley Coyne, The Vulgar Boatman, *was published by Scribners in January. Although this is his first story in EQMM, he has written over a hundred stories and articles for such diverse magazines as* Yankee, The Writer, Better Homes & Gardens, Field & Stream, *and* Sports Illustrated. *An anthology of his hunting and fishing stories was published by Scribners in the spring.*

"There's hope?" David asked the doctor.

"Hope? Certainly. More than hope. There's a procedure."

"A procedure."

"Yes. Fix you up. Make you better. Better than ever. Make a new man out of you . . ."

A NEW MAN

by WILLIAM G. TAPPLY

"I love the titmouses. They have such sad eyes."

"Hm? What's that, my dear?"

"The titmouses, David."

"Ah, yes. Gentle little buggers." David Potter peered around the side of the newspaper he held folded vertically in front of him. His rimless glasses perched low on the fleshy part of his nose like a chickadee on the tip of a pine bough. "Titmice," he added.

"What?"

"Titmice, dear. It's titmice. Not titmouses."

"You old jackass," she muttered under her breath, so that David could pretend he didn't hear her if he chose. She bent her head to the large stoneware mug of coffee she held in both hands for warmth and hunched her shoulders deeper into her black-and-red-checked

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wool jacket. Taking coffee on the deck had been David's idea: "So we can watch the birds at the feeders," he had said—and then proceeded to stick his nose in the paper. Typical.

Betty thought it was too cold, even if the first official day of spring had arrived, to take morning coffee on the deck. Stubborn patches of grey snow still lay like dirty pillowcases in the shady places under the pines and against the north wall of the house, and puffs of steam rose from David's mouth as he breathed into his newspaper. But after twenty-six years of marriage, she didn't argue with her husband. He got his way with the small things. Coffee on the deck in March. Titmice. Actually, he was probably right about titmice.

She sipped from her mug and studied her husband. He was, she thought, exactly as he appeared to be: shy, sensitive, diligent, humorless. His courses at the college were dependably well attended, mainly because they were required of all English majors, a fact about which David held neither illusions nor regrets. His only vice, as far as Betty knew, was the big copper-stained meerschaum pipe upon which he puffed as he labored over sophomoric compositions in his study in the evenings, and his only passion was ornithology. David wasn't the sort of man who'd hide a vice or a passion from his wife.

As she watched him, he leaned back into his canvas deck chair, sighed deeply, and let the newspaper drop beside him. He stared at the birds flitting around the feeders and began to weep.

"David—?"

"Aren't they beautiful?" He raised his hands, palms upward, toward the sky, like an Old Testament prophet. "My God, what perfection." Tears streamed down his cheeks.

Betty pushed herself out of her chair and went to kneel beside him. "David," she whispered, "are you all right?"

"Give me a nuthatch any day!" he suddenly shouted.

She touched his cheek. He stood up and went to the rail. She followed him and put a hand on his shoulder. He looked down at her. "How'd you like to be a crossbill?" he said.

"Oh, David."

He closed his eyes. Betty moved in front of him and put her arms around his waist. He lowered his chin onto the top of her head. "Jesus, it hurts," he whispered into her hair. "Did I do it again?"

She tilted her head back to look into his face. "Yes."

"I cried."

"Yes."

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"I don't—I didn't feel that I was crying. It was an intense feeling, like an orgasm inside my head. Pain and pleasure, mixed. The pain is still here." He tapped softly at his right eyebrow with the tips of two fingers.

"I'm going to call the doctor."

"Okay," he said.

She turned quickly away from him, afraid he might see the tears that sprang to her own eyes. He had never before allowed her to take his spells seriously. "Nonsense," he always harumphed. "Little headache—eyestrain. Aspirin. Be fine in a minute."

Now, she realized, he was as terrified as she was.

"Pass that pen to me, will you, Mr. Potter?"

David smiled at the doctor.

"Mr. Potter, did you understand what I asked you to do?"

"Sure. You asked me to pass you the pen."

"Did you pass me the pen?"

"No."

"Can you pass me the pen, Mr. Potter?"

"Of course."

"Pass me the pen, then, please."

David Potter smiled at the doctor.

The big machine swiveled, whirred, hummed, clicked—a giant machine in the quiet green garden of David Potter's mind. "Hold your breath, now, Mr. Potter," said the girl, and then she disappeared and the machine buzzed. Then the girl came back. She took his head in her soft hands and moved it so that his forehead pressed against the cold glass. "Don't move, now," she trilled. Again the machine buzzed.

David Potter lay under the machine and he cried, and this time he knew he was crying. And he knew why.

"This is your brain, looking at it from the top," said the doctor. David gazed at the top view of his brain. It was an oval sketched in pencil. Then the doctor drew a straight line which bisected the oval the long way. "The hemispheres, left and right. Your tumor is here." With his pencil, the doctor jabbed at a point on the bisecting line between the left and right halves of David's brain. Then he drew a circle and darkened it in. "It's about the size of an egg."

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David adjusted his eyeglasses and looked at the egg in his brain. "What kind of egg?"

"What do you mean, what kind of egg? An *egg*. A breakfast egg. A hen's egg, okay? That's what we *mean* by an egg, Mr. Potter."

David smiled. "I'd rather hoped a hummingbird egg."

The doctor didn't smile. "That's not what we call an egg. That would be what we call a marble. Or a pea. I don't know how big hummingbird eggs actually are."

"Pea-sized, actually."

"If this," continued the doctor, poking at the egg in David's brain with his pencil, "were a *pea,* our problem would be less challenging. On the other hand, Mr. Potter, you can think of it this way: if it were a grapefruit—what you'd perhaps call an ostrich egg, eh?"—and here the doctor did smile—"if it were a grapefruit, there would be no hope whatsoever."

"There's hope?"

"Hope? Certainly. More than hope. There's a procedure."

"A procedure."

"Yes. Fix you up. Make you better. Better than ever. Make a new man out of you."

"Betty—that's my wife, who set up this appointment, who insisted I come here—Betty says I haven't been myself lately."

"Haven't been yourself, eh?" The doctor chuckled. "Yes. Nicely put." He pointed his pencil at David. "You haven't, you know."

"Haven't what?"

"Been yourself."

"Who the hell *have* I been, then?"

"Mr. Potter," sighed the doctor, "you have a large tumor in the middle of your brain. It's growing rapidly. It's exerting a tremendous amount of pressure. It causes you intense pain. It is slowly destroying those parts of your brain where your emotions, your judgment, your self-censoring mechanisms are located. This tumor is eating up your brain, Mr. Potter. Without this procedure, it will continue to consume it—progressively and irreversibly. Without this procedure, you will die."

"I'm losing my mind, then. That's what you mean."

"It's your *brain* that's being destroyed. I don't know anything about your *mind.* I don't deal in minds. I don't know what a mind *is.* I'm talking about a brain, an organ of the body, a functional mechanism which can break down, which can malfunction, but which can be repaired. I'm not talking about a mind."

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"You're talking in riddles." David held both hands in front of his chest, palms outward, then dropped them in his lap. "Anyhow, I don't care. I just don't give a fat shit."

David Potter smiled and cried.

The doctor nodded his head. "That's typical," he said.

"The idea," David said to Betty as he pushed an anchovy to the side of his salad bowl, "is that they cut out this egg thing in my head and take my personality along with it. Then they replace it with one of those tiny micro-computer chips with a miniature atomic battery that will last several lifetimes and hook it up to the various neurons and ganglia and whatnot up there, and all the old circuits will be restored. I'll be a new man. Same principle as a pacemaker. Keeps things humming along."

"That sounds wonderful. You're not eating your anchovies."

"Wonderful? What was wrong with the *old* man?"

"You're not making sense, David."

"I said I'd be a new man, and you said that would be wonderful. I just wanted to know what sort of improvements over the old model we should order up while we're at it. It's not many wives who get the chance to fine-tune their husbands after twenty-odd years of sniffing out all the defects. So why don't you make a list and we'll deliver it to the surgeon so he can adjust the wattage on his little computer before he slips it in there? Then you'll have your new man, just like you want."

"You're being unnecessarily paranoid, David. It was just a figure of speech."

"Being paranoid is typical, so I'm told. So is changing your dietary preferences. And so is the ability to feel your own brain getting eaten alive. To stand aside and fold your arms and frown thoughtfully and go 'hmm' and 'tsk-tsk' and 'aha' as you say byebye to the only mind you ever had. Anyhow, I never liked anchovies. I only pretended to. Because I loved you."

"Oh, David," said Betty, "I'm so frightened."

George Southby sat across the scarred table from David. Inside the tavern it was cool and dark. They sipped their beer from frosted mugs.

"So what's it like?" asked David.

Southby put his hand up to his face, cupping it over his right eye.

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He bobbed his head, then took his hand away and held it open. "Here. My eye. Is that me?"

David stared at the glass eye.

Southby reached under the table with both of his hands. A moment later, he placed his shoe on the table between them. Inside the shoe was Southby's foot. "My foot, okay? You want the ankle, lower leg, knee, thigh? I figure I'm equally me, with or without the spare parts. There are guys, you know, with nylon arteries, plastic hearts. People go to hospitals to rent time on electric kidneys. There are folks with baggies for bowels. They say those synthetic blood vessels are an improvement over the originals. So what's your problem?" He tossed his eye back and forth between his hands.

"When does it stop being you?" David said.

"It's always you, pal."

"This is different. An eye, a leg—they're supplementary parts. Body, not soul."

"Who's to say?" said Southby. "Who's to say you're defined more by a lump of white stuff inside your skull than you are by an eye or a leg or an artery? Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Part of you is broken, so they're going to fix it up."

"Well, I'm not an automobile."

Southby leaned back and grinned, one-eyed. "Oh?" he said.

He sat beside Betty in the doctor's office. She hitched her chair close beside his and reached her hand over to hold his. He kept his arms folded. She let her hand fall onto his knee, and after a moment pulled it back.

"Your choice is really quite simple, Mr. Potter," the doctor was saying. "Forego the procedure and you'll die. Within a year. We can help you negotiate the pain, of course, though you'll be unconscious a good part of the time. I should expect your personality to become quite unrecognizable to your friends and loved ones. As you know, the symptoms have already begun. The sudden, unmotivated crying. The loss of the self-censoring process. The distractability. The perversions of judgment. You aren't the man you were, Mr. Potter. And tomorrow you'll be someone else."

"I suppose I don't want to die," said David. Betty's hand touched his arm, hovered there for a moment like a hawk cruising high in the clouds, then withdrew.

"Naturally." The doctor smiled.

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"And with your procedure?"

"The pain will disappear. Permanently. We can excise the tumor completely. With it, of course, will come a fairly sizeable portion of your brain. Hence the implant."

"Ah. The implant."

"To assume the functions of that portion of the brain we must remove."

"Of course. The functions. To control my emotions, exercise my initiative and judgment for me—those sorts of functions."

"Essentially, yes."

"Like Southby's plastic leg assumes the function of walking and his fake eye the function of seeing."

"George's eye is glass, David," said Betty. "It serves no function."

"Oh, do shut up, Betty. Try not to be an utter imbecile. An ordinary imbecile will suffice."

"He never would have spoken to me like that," Betty said to the doctor.

The doctor smiled and nodded.

"I'm surprised you're allowing me to make this decision," said David. "I mean, I'm not myself these days, as all of you are so eager to point out. And if I'm not myself, I must be somebody else. Do you think I want some stranger making important decisions about me? So tell me: what *will* I be like after I get my artificial mind?"

The doctor's eyes slid away, paused briefly on Betty's intense stare, then finally came to rest on a faraway place over her shoulder. He cleared his throat.

"We don't actually know."

They stared at him. "You don't know?" said Betty.

"Oh, eventually we should be able to, ah, approximate your husband. We can adjust it to pretty close tolerances. As I've told you, we still consider it experimental. But we feel we've had good success so far. It's quite a fascinating science, really. And we have excellent therapeutic techniques. Not unlike your friend with the leg prosthesis, when you think about it. I expect he can walk now so that no one can tell it's not real. It took a lot of work and practice. It will be that way with your husband."

"So," said David slowly, "it will appear to be me, but it won't be. My friends will detect the psychic limp, so to speak, but to strangers I'll look like someone with his own mind."

"Not mind," said the doctor patiently. "Brain, Mr. Potter. An or-

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gan, that's all. You must think of it as a part of your body. Not, for heaven's sake, your soul."

"A case of matter over mind, eh, doctor?" David smiled.

The doctor chuckled. "Matter over mind. Why, yes. I've never heard it put that way."

"Either way I die."

"Oh, David," said Betty, "don't be dramatic."

"It's a great gadget, Mr. Potter. You won't believe it, but I used to be a real serious guy, a regular Gloomy Gus, before my implant. Worried all the time. Work, work, work. Hell, the Red Sox would lose a close one to the Yanks and I'd be depressed all night, you know? Always thinking about money, wondering what the kids were doing, watching the stock market, working too hard—my mind going a million miles an hour, imagining all sorts of things, you know? There wasn't anything I didn't worry about. And I'd sit there and think about it until my head hurt. I mean, even before my tumor. I'd turn it around and around in my head, look at it from all sides, try to find something wrong, something to worry about, even if there wasn't anything. But usually I'd find something, you know? You look hard enough, you'll find something sooner or later. And then that thing started to grow up there, hey, you don't think I worried about *that?* Blessing in disguise, it was, believe me, Mr. Potter. Look at me now. Not a care in the world. Stopped imagining all those bad things. Bingo—gone.

"And I got my full disability, don't have to do a lick of work. Come in here once a month for a tuneup, that's about it. Go fishing whenever I feel like doing anything. I can sit there all day, not catch a thing, and I couldn't care less. Golf game's gone all to hell, but I don't throw clubs any more. Mow the lawn. Grow tomatoes. Just as happy as a pig in shit, Mr. Potter, you should excuse the expression, but it's pretty accurate. The little woman's never been happier with me, and that's the truth. She doesn't bug me the way she used to, either. All those habits I used to hate, they don't bother me a bit. Funniest damn thing, though. The full moon, can you believe it? Something about the pull of gravity, or magnetic forces, or I don't know. Throws the implant out of whack. Jekyl and Hyde, they tell me. Anyhow, it's no sweat. They bring me in here and give me a little zap and I'm okay again. Better than ever. Good thing you got a chance to talk to me, huh? Because I know just how you feel. Went

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through it myself, all worried. But look at me. This'll be you, too, after you get your implant. Better than ever, Mr. Potter."

"I'm so very sorry," David muttered.

The decision confused him enormously. Not that he seemed to have much of a choice. He did want to live, so he had to have the operation. But it was the responsibility of it that bothered him.

He made the decision on Thursday. The procedure, as the doctor liked to call it, was scheduled for a week from the following Monday. He knew that by the time the ten days had elapsed, a different man would be wheeled into the operating room from the one who had finally said, "Okay, we'll go for the operation, then."

Was it right for that man to decide for the other man? What of the man they'd wheel *out* of the operating room? What right did he, David Potter, with his tumor, have to decide the fate of that new man, the man without a tumor, the man with the nuclear-powered computer chip in his head? The man with the synthetic soul?

So when they wheeled him in, his last words to Betty were: "Goodbye. Don't mourn. I hope you'll enjoy your new husband."

And when she kissed his cheek, squeezed his shoulder, and smiled, he began to weep again. Because he then knew he really wouldn't be mourned, and a stranger would take his place—no one would even miss him.

He stared up at the huge moonshaped light. A circle of green-masked and -capped faces stared down at him. Sounds floated to him from the masks, but he could make no sense of them. Then the faces began to melt. Eyes drooped and slid down cheeks like broken eggs. The sounds came to his ears as if from underwater.

He began to drift with the distorted, masked faces. He floated effortlessly, as if on a cloud, and soon he found himself in a dank, tangled forest. It was warm there, and humid, and the foliage grew thick and lush, but he glided along smoothly, not fast, at a steady pace past the trees. He noticed the birds and his heart swelled with love. The titmice and nuthatches and finches cruised along with him, barely flapping their wings, watching him with their sad, gentle eyes. They seemed to ride the warm, moist currents of air the way he was himself. He felt he could steer by leaning a little to one side or the other. He tried it and found he could swoop and dart with the birds.

He soon realized he was floating on a river. He felt himself borne

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high on the crests of the rippling currents. He seemed to be moving upstream, faster and faster, and one by one the titmice and nuthatches and finches stopped to light in the trees and watch him go on until he was alone. The river wound through a green-and-blue river, which grew close to the banks and shut off the sunlight. He noticed the leaves, each as big as a man, with sharp, serrated edges. The trees trailed thick vines from their high branches and birds perched in the vines. They weren't the familiar birds of his back yard now, but great iridescent yellow-and-green birds—monsters, really, with huge, scythelike bills and steel claws and glass eyes that seemed to follow his passage upstream.

He sped faster and faster atop the currents of the ever-narrowing river. He could no longer tell where the hot, moist air stopped and the river began. He seemed to be carried inside a thick wet cloud, and those monstrous birds were in there—he couldn't see them, but he could hear them, clanking like chains as they flew. The colors of the jungle melted and merged like wet watercolors all around him. He felt himself being sucked up the narrow channel, twisting upward, spinning, dizzy, spiraling, and suddenly I stopped and it was light again all around me, a bright orangeyellow fluorescent light reflecting off the concrete and glass. I found myself standing on the edge of a vast white paved plaza. In the distance rose glass-and-steel buildings, geometric and angular. In the middle of the plaza a helicopter crouched. Its engine purred and, as I watched, the great blade of its propeller began its accelerating twirl.

A young woman, infinitely young, dressed all in white, waited at the steps. She beckoned to me and I went to her. I reached my hand up. She smiled, a perfect smile, and took my hand. Her grip was cool and firm.

She urged me up the steps into the helicopter.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

Her smile glittered like polished chrome. "Where you've never been before."

I returned her smile. I was ready for that journey. I felt wonderful. A new man.

I lean my forearms on the steel railing and watch them come swooping in, bluntnosed, silverskinned, turbines aroar. I love their sleek symmetry. I love the smell of burning fuel, the squeal and skid of brakes on asphalt, the geometric expanses of runway, the

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steel and glass of terminals and towers. I could watch these great birds forever.

Elizabeth, beside me, lifts her head and speaks. "There were some grosbeaks in the feeders this morning, dear."

I turn to her and she smiles. My hands touch her shoulders. Her mouth begins to form words. My hands move up, caressing her neck. My thumbs find the hollow place. They press and squeeze. She coughs once and gags, her eyes first searching mine, then rolling up into her head. She slumps to the tiled floor.

Two men in uniform approach me, revolvers drawn. Arms grab me. I laugh. Yes, I have murdered the bitch. But it's the perfect crime, don't you agree? Who will not think David Potter did it?

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the final excerpt from her novel-in-progress by

HEIDI VANDERBILT

"Please call Belinda Grey to the stand."

Belinda slid her novel into her handbag and closed Sammy's file. On the stand, her nervousness seemed to disappear. Her high thin voice projected pleasantly and with assurance.

"What is your opinion, Mrs. Grey," Christine's lawyer asked, "of the relationship between Ms. Spencer and her son?"

"There is undoubtedly a great deal of stress in their relationship. However, there is also a great deal of love between them. I don't think anyone would argue with that." Marta saw Christine nod her head. "The Department's policy is to keep families together, not break them up. I believe this is a situation where, with help, Ms. Spencer could one day adequately care for her son."

No! Marta thought.

This sixth and final excerpt from Heidi Vanderbilt's novel will satisfy EQMM readers as to the outcome of Sammy's thorny custody hearing. The published novel, when available, will carry his story further. Watch for it . . . !

JUDGMENTS

by HEIDI VANDERBILT

Darren's call woke her. The long-distance line was so clear he sounded next to her.

"I just want you to know that you're going to win in court today," he said. "I wish for our son's sake that you'd lose, but you'll win."

He hung up before Marta could say anything.

She turned off the alarm before it rang. Her ex-husband's dramatics disturbed her. She never made scenes—anger left her tongue-

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tied and uncertain. The day she left Darren it was he, her oh-so-rational psychotherapist husband, who had opened a jar of brandied pears and poured the contents into her suitcase. She had silently closed it and, taking their son Ezra and the dog, left. When the Oregon state trooper pulled her over as she sped north from Los Angeles to the island in Puget Sound, she had meekly submitted to the breath-o-lizer test he requested when the fumes from the reeking luggage reached him. Rather than explain what had happened, she quietly accepted the speeding ticket, his suspicious glances at Ezra and Ruckus sleeping in the back seat, and his lecture about highway fatalities. It wasn't until she reached the house her father had left her on the tiny, hilly island and unpacked her soaked and stinking clothes that she began humming songs about freedom, picturing herself standing up to Darren and the policeman rather than driving away from both mute, shaken, diminished.

Since childhood, she had seen herself as an outline, barely suggested. If one day she were to look in the mirror and see no one there, she would just shrug, accept that she had vanished, and continue whatever she was doing. Perhaps one day her face would return while she worked in the darkroom, appear in the red light as she stood over a tray of developer. Then she would quickly slip her image into the fixer to trap it. When she worked, she pored over contact sheets, trying to find the truth about the person she had photographed. She had become a photographer to fix images, improve them, make them permanent.

She looked out the bedroom window at the heavy sky, at the tree trunks black after last night's storm. Whatever leaves had hung on through October had given up overnight and fallen, a sodden Moroccan carpet covering the ground. Wind leached through the window, carrying a faint scent of wood smoke from the Timms' farm down the hill.

Sammy's custody hearing would start in two hours. Darren was wrong that saving Sammy from his mother would hurt Ezra. Having a new child in the house was difficult for everyone, sibling rivalry was normal, something they could work out. Sure, the boys fought, but they played together, too. If Darren was right and Christine's parental rights really were ended today—as Sammy's social worker Belinda Grey also assured her they would be—the strain of court appearances would be over and Marta could begin the work of creating their lives together, working through their days until she and Sammy and Ezra were a continuous, interconnected unit, no longer

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in danger of being unraveled by social workers or by Sammy's mother, Christine.

Marta knew Ezra better than his father did, and she knew Sammy. Both boys had strength and sweetness. Ezra had the advantage of his beginnings—parents who loved and cared for him—and of his intelligence and imagination. Sammy's beginnings could hardly have been worse, but he was clever and quick. With love and care, she could make them a family.

Marta looked out at the pond. All autumn it had reflected the green, gold, and red of the turning trees. Today it returned the sky's flat grey, except where one sheltered madrone tree hung onto its ruby leaves.

The children were already in the kitchen when she came down, cereal boxes slumped in puddles of milk. Ezra, barely visible behind his bowl, was looking at Steichen's *World War II*. Sammy, a paper towel in his hand, wiped up the spills.

"Hi, guys." Marta lifted the kettle to fill it, but found it full and hot.

"I turned it on," Sammy said.

"Thanks. I'd rather you didn't use the stove unless I'm with you, though." She made instant coffee. "Why are you doing that, Sam? Neither of you ever clean up unless I make you."

Without looking up from his book, Ezra poured more cereal and milk. "I don't know why *he's* doing it," he said. "*I'm* not."

Sammy wiped Ezra's place last, threw the paper towel into the garbage pail, closed the cereal boxtops, and put them away.

"Come here, Sammy." Marta pulled him onto her lap. "What's up?"

He shrugged. He always shrugged. If she was ever asked the characteristic gesture of both children, she would tell how Sammy shrugged and Ezra shot imaginary guns. Since her divorce from Darren, Ezra lived his days armed, fingers loaded with whatever ammunition he might need.

Here in the cold early morning, seated in her kitchen with all the lights on, Marta looked at the little boy on her lap. His hair was almost white, his skin so smooth it seemed impossible he could have passed through such a traumatic life. Just these past months since he had come to live with her should have coarsened his skin, but when she kissed his round cheeks or stroked them with the backs

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of her fingers he felt like a satin child. Yet he seemed to her opaque. She could not see into him.

On the other hand, Ezra, buried behind his books so that only his dark curls were visible, was translucent. Light seemed to pass into and out of him. Though she couldn't see everything about him, he was readable, illuminated.

"Well, I really appreciate your cleaning up, Sam, thank you. Now are you two ready for school?"

Sammy wrapped his arms around her neck and clung.

"What's the matter, Sammy? Court?"

Of course it was court. It was always court. The legalities, necessary though they were, tortured this child they were trying to help. The judge would try not to call Sammy to the courthouse, and if Sammy was needed he would be brought to the judge's chambers, not the courtroom. But Marta lived with Sammy before and after these hearings and knew his fear, his uncertainty, and the rage he pounded out in tantrum after tantrum. On court days, she knew, he sat at his desk in school wondering whether Belinda would appear to take him to the judge. Sammy had nightmares about judges: they kidnaped his mother and he had to try to save her; they kidnaped him from his mother; they took him from Marta and sent him where his mother, whom he loved and feared, would find him. Marta had nightmares about judges, too. And when Sammy woke screaming and told his to her, she held him and thought of her own.

"This hearing will be over in a few hours, Sammy," she tried to comfort him. "It won't be any different from the others. We got through those okay, right?"

His back rigid, Sammy trudged upstairs. He returned with George, the teddy bear Marta had given him, whose eyes he had pulled out in a rage earlier in the week. He stuffed it into his bookbag. Instead of teasing him, Ezra went upstairs himself and came down with his GI Joes. He offered one to Sammy—"For protection, small shot"—and tucked the other two in his jeans pockets, their rifles extended.

Just as Marta was leaving to take the boys to their bus stop, the phone rang. She almost didn't answer for fear it was Darren calling back.

"I know from when I had a foster kid what these hearings is like," Anne Timms' voice roared over the line. "There anything I can do?"

"You could come testify about Christine."

"Hell, no, honey. Not that. I don't want Christine after me. I've seen too much of that woman in my life and I've had too much to

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do with them social workers. I *admire* what you're tryin' to do for Sammy, but I'm not sure it's the right thing."

Marta struggled into her slicker and herded the children out to the car, mentally raging at Darren and Anne and everyone else who wouldn't help, who doubted her motives and Sammy's ability to get well.

After dropping the kids off, she pulled the Subaru over to the side of Cliff Road, careful not to let the folder of Christine's letters to Sammy slide off the passenger seat. She got out and walked through Sitka pines to the cliff's edge. Yesterday's storm had left the roads puddled and muddy, the harbor wrinkled grey.

Town, squashed between the waterfront and Taylor Peak, looked ghostly, abandoned. She knew that realtors, bankers, and fishermen were sitting in the Belly-Up, drinking oily coffee and eating doughnuts and fried eggs with ketchup. On the far side of town, a huge American flag billowed over the island's only school, where Sammy and Ezra now sat in their second- and third-grade classrooms. Rounding the point in the harbor, the first morning ferry carried the lawyers, social workers, and judge to today's hearing.

What if Christine seemed fine today, came to court sober and lucid? Who but Marta knew how bad things really were? Who would believe her? Did she seem overattached, an overpossessive foster mother? She was as much on trial as Christine, always questioned about her finances, her emotional stability, her attitudes and skills as a parent.

She was exhausted and afraid of her own ambivalence. Some days she feared having Sammy with her and Ezra forever. Other days, like today, she feared losing him.

Her watch read quarter to nine. The ferry docked and cars began to inch down the ramp onto the wharf. Marta walked back to the Subaru and got in.

Ochre leaves clung to the branches of the rain-darkened trees outside the brick courthouse. Marta's friend Marjorie Meade waited on the steps, dressed in sandals, fuzzy pink socks, a faded denim skirt, and another of her seemingly endless hand-knit sweaters, this one purple, with stars and a crescent moon. Her son Jason carried a wool hedgehog under one arm, his plastic boat under the other.

Marjorie enveloped Marta in an embrace of patchouli and mohair.

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"I'm on my way to open the shop and thought I'd wish you good luck."

"Luck," Jason said.

"Thanks," said Marta. People pushed past them. She looked to see if any of them were involved in Sammy's case, but she didn't recognize anyone.

Jason tugged his mother's hand. "Let's go work."

"I better go in," Marta said.

"How do you feel?"

"Like throwing up."

"You'll do fine," Marjorie said. "Say goodbye, Jason."

"Luck," Jason said.

"Marta!" The green hallway was crowded with nervous people. Belinda, tall and muscular, wearing a buffalo-plaid dress and cowboy boots, pushed her way through, followed by a heavy man almost as tall as she. "This is Jerry Lenihan, new lawyer for the Department. Jerry, Marta Cummings, Sammy's foster mother."

"Who's our judge?" Marta asked.

"Judge Mora." Jerry sat down next to her on the empty bench and shook her hand. What had Belinda told him about her on the way over? Marta wondered. What would they say on the ferry going back?

"Good morning, Marta." It was Christine. "You look fat." She wore Charles Jourdan boots and a fur jacket over a maroon-silk dress. Gold and diamond jewelry glittered on her scrawny wrist and hand. She looked, to Marta's frightened eyes, absolutely normal.

Christine waved at a small man in a blue pinstripe suit following her. "Hajakian," she said. "My lawyer."

Belinda greeted her. "How are you, Christine?"

"Very, very fine, Miss Grey," Christine said. "Who's this?"

"I'm Jerry Lenihan, the lawyer for the Department of Child Welfare."

"*Are* you? Child Welfare? You are representing my son, then? Samuel—the minor child, as you attorneys say—who has brought us all together?"

"I represent the state," Jerry said. "Sammy has his own attorney and a court-appointed guardian ad litem."

"Then who represents me?"

Jerry looked startled. "Your lawyer."

"My lawyer is an asshole," Christine said.

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Hajakian tugged at his tie, but said nothing.

Christine held her open palm to him, colored pills mounded on it. "Take two, Hajakian. You could use them."

The lawyer declined. Instead of taking them herself, as Marta expected and hoped she would, Christine pocketed them and sat down so close Marta had to slide over.

"So—" Christine turned to Belinda "—where's Sammy?"

"In school."

"What do you mean, in school? Why isn't he here? This is about him, isn't it?"

"Sammy doesn't need to be here." Belinda tried to calm her. "The judge might send for him later."

"He does *so* need to be here! I demand he be here! Where's the judge? I want to see him!"

"Later," Belinda said. "Come on, Christine. You don't want to make a scene."

The bailiff called everyone into the cavernous, paneled courtroom and swore them in as a group. They listened to the rapid words of the oath and in one voice responded, "I do." The courtroom was cold—all the warm air from the radiators lay up by the ceiling. Marta didn't want to shiver, to look afraid. The November light, thin and high as a child's whine, seeped through the tall windows and washed the room in shades of grey. Acid yellow light from the chandeliers spilled over the tables, the chairs, the benches.

Marta had hoped Christine would show up stoned. Instead, she settled herself demurely behind the defense table.

Only those directly involved with Sammy's life could watch the proceedings, so the bailiff sent everyone except Christine, the lawyers, the social workers, and Marta out to the hall. Witnesses would be brought in one at a time to give their testimony, then leave. On his way out of the courtroom, Dan Flynn, the school principal, leaned over the mahogany rail separating the lawyers' tables from the judge's bench and handed Marta an envelope.

Marta slipped her fingernail under the flap and opened it. Inside was a piece of white paper torn from a notepad and folded over. She unfolded it and read the penciled scrawl: "Whatever happens, I will always admire your concern for a troubled child." She put it back in the envelope and held it, the paper growing warm in her palm.

She was sitting next to Belinda behind the prosecution table. The social worker had Sammy's file open on her lap. When Marta looked

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over, she saw that on the papers in the file was a novel with a cowboy on the cover. Belinda opened the book and began to read.

"Don't you need to listen?" Marta asked.

Belinda shook her head.

"Oyez, oyez!" the bailiff mumbled.

Marta stood with the others in the room as the judge, a middle-aged Japanese woman with a white streak in her short black hair, entered and sat in the leather chair behind the bench. Marta studied her face—wide and round, the black eyes hidden behind tinted bifocals. This woman would judge her. This woman could keep Sammy in Marta's care or send him back to his mother. Though she tried, Marta could find no omen in the judge's posture or expression as she shuffled papers before her and called for the lawyers to come forward.

As they stood before the judge, Marta could hear only their whispers and an occasional soft laugh. Tall, short, thin, heavy, they were dressed in almost identical suits.

Marta glanced at Christine in her expensive silk and fur. Where was the madwoman Marta had counted on?

"Very well," the judge said. "Let's get started."

Like football players breaking from a huddle, the lawyers separated and returned to their tables.

Dan Flynn was called first. A thin man with a weathered, ruddy face, he fidgeted in the witness chair while Jerry Lenihan questioned him.

"How long has Sammy Spencer been a student in your school?"

"Since kindergarten. He's in second grade now."

"Do you have Sammy's attendance records?"

"Right here."

"In kindergarten, how many days was Sammy absent?"

"He was absent one hundred and twenty of one hundred and eighty days."

Out of the corner of her eye, Marta saw Christine turn to her lawyer. Hajakian listened, nodding.

"In first grade," the principal answered Lenihan's next question, "Sammy was absent ninety-nine days out of one hundred and eighty."

"And this year?" the lawyer asked.

"This year Sammy's been absent only four days."

"Bull!" Christine cried. Hajakian put his hand on her arm.

"Why was Sammy absent this year, Mr. Flynn, do you know?"

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"He was undergoing psychological and medical tests and educational evaluations ordered by this court."

"No more questions."

Hajakian stood and walked toward the school principal.

"Did you ever discuss with Ms. Spencer why her son was absent so much in kindergarten and first grade?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"She said she was traveling, or that he had been sick, or that she had kept him home because she wanted to."

"Excepting that last, aren't those valid reasons for a child to miss school?"

"Not for missing that much school," Dan Flynn said. "Besides, during the times Ms. Spencer said they were away, I saw them here in town. And there were no doctor's notes confirming any of the illnesses."

Christine sat quietly as the witness was excused and was followed to the stand by two of Sammy's teachers. They corroborated what had already been said, adding that since Sammy had moved to Marta's he no longer came to school in ragged or inappropriate clothes, he participated more in class, he fought less on the playground, and he was better able to concentrate.

The police chief testified that he had received calls over the years from people in the community who complained that Sammy was being physically abused, left alone, or taken to bars.

A shopkeeper Marta didn't recognize told of Christine bringing Sammy in one day several years before. "He was just a little thing," the woman said, twisting the strap of a burgundy-leatherette handbag on her knees. "I noticed him right away, even though it was summer and we were crowded. This sweet child was standing in front of one of the display cases, his hair all white and spiky and his eyes huge. I thought he might be alone, then I saw her." The woman pointed at Christine. "Her hair wasn't black like it is now. It was pale like her son's. She bent down next to him and asked him what he'd like. He pointed at some little thing, I don't remember what, and she said, real nice, 'Do you want that?' He said yes. She said, 'Maybe later.' She kept him hanging like that, saying, 'Maybe later, maybe later,' while she looked around, picking things up, putting them down, buying stuff for herself, until he was whining and pleading. Then she screamed at him for begging and yanked him out of the store. I followed them out and saw her pull him into her car and

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hit him across the mouth hard, three or four times. No one should be allowed to treat a child like that."

"Object!"

"All right, all right," the judge said. "Any more questions?"

When they broke for lunch, Marta was feeling good about the testimony so far. She got to the Belly-Up before any of the others and sat at a table near the window overlooking the harbor.

"What'll it be?" the waitress asked.

Marta ordered a cheese sandwich.

Marjorie, squinting into the darkness, came in with Jason and sat at Marta's table. "So," she whispered, "has Christine gone cuckoo yet?"

"She's saner than I am today," Marta said. "The testimony's against her, but she seems fine."

Belinda and the lawyers took a long table near the door. Christine stayed at the bar with Hajakian.

"She'll get drunk now," Marjorie said.

But the bartender served them sandwiches and Cokes. Christine turned her back on Hajakian and ate staring at Marta.

Jason hugged his boat to his chest. "Why that lady looking at me, Mommy?"

"She's not, honey." Marjorie stood up. "We're going. Call me when you get home, Marta."

Back at the courthouse, Marta noticed that someone had lined the steps with last night's carved pumpkins. Their silly, grotesque faces leered at her as she passed by.

"Please remember," the bailiff said, "you are still under oath. All rise."

Belinda had kept her nose in her book most of the morning, but Marta noticed she had only turned five pages. She wasn't feeling as cavalier as she pretended. She gave Marta a tight nod and half smile as they sat, then opened Sammy's folder on her lap. One foot jiggled.

"Nervous?" Marta asked.

"Not really," Belinda said, but her voice trembled and a ropy knot moved up and down her jaw.

The Department's homefinder, an elderly black man with tight white curls, testified to the suitable condition of Marta's home. Another social worker, a square-faced iron-haired woman in a red polka-dot blouse, testified to the squalor in Christine's.

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Christine shifted in her seat, looked over at Marta, smiled at Belinda, and talked to her lawyer, who repeatedly shushed her.

"Please call Belinda Grey to the stand."

Belinda slid her novel into her handbag and closed Sammy's file. On the stand, her nervousness seemed to disappear. Her disproportionately high thin voice projected pleasantly and with assurance.

"What is your opinion, Mrs. Grey," Christine's lawyer asked, "of the relationship between Ms. Spencer and her son?"

"There is undoubtedly a great deal of stress in their relationship. However, there is also a great deal of love between them. I don't think anyone would argue with that." Marta saw Christine nod her head. "The Department's policy is to keep families together, not break them up. I believe this is a situation where, with help, Ms. Spencer could one day adequately care for her son."

No! Marta thought.

"What, then, is the recommendation of the Department?" the lawyer asked.

"We recommend that Sammy continue in temporary foster care while his mother receives counseling."

"It is my understanding," Judge Mora said, "that Ms. Spencer has refused all offers of help from your Department and that she has failed to show up for appointments ordered by this court. What makes you think this would change if she had another, say, six months?"

"I've spoken to her at some length, Your Honor. Ms. Spencer feels she has been treated unfairly—that the therapists she was assigned to see were hostile to her."

Jerry Lenihan turned to Marta. "Did you know Belinda was going to testify this way?"

Marta shook her head.

"Me, neither. *Damn.*"

"So," the judge said to Belinda, "you feel there is hope for this relationship?"

"If the parent-child bond can be kept intact—and I believe that is possible in this case—that is the ideal."

Jerry stood. "May I question the witness?"

"Of course," the judge said.

"Mrs. Grey, what contact has this mother had with her child since his removal from her home seven months ago?"

"She has written to him," she replied. "And I supervised a visit yesterday."

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"Even though she was granted liberal visitation."

"I was not!" Christine said.

"In the long run," Belinda said icily, "Sammy stands a better chance if we can keep him with his mother."

Cold horror washed through Marta. Sammy maimed. Sammy dead. Belinda must have lost her mind. She must know that Christine could never be well enough to care for him. Was Belinda fooled by Christine's composure at this hearing? Did she see in Christine her alcoholic daughter? Had she confused them, client and daughter, insanity and alcoholism? Was Marta the only person who understood the damage Christine would do her son? Belinda couldn't be serious, she couldn't really be up on the stand, under oath, saying that Christine should have Sammy!

After Belinda, Susan Svendsen, Sammy's therapist, was called.

The tiny, fragile-boned woman practically vanished into the witness chair. "Essentially, I agree with Mrs. Grey," she said, and Marta felt her world fall out from under her. "Whenever possible, a child should remain in his own family." Susan spoke in a singsong. "Sometimes that isn't possible, of course. Then we must consider alternatives. In Sammy's case, I've tried to take into account several things. First, there is his love for his mother. They were everything to each other for seven years. Even though this may not have been a healthy arrangement, it cannot be minimized. That love is primal.

"Second, there is the question of where Sammy would grow up if he never returns to his mother. There are no fully licensed foster homes on this island. Therefore, Sammy would have to leave here. This would be another great loss for him. He was born here and has lived here all his life. He would lose his mother *and* his island."

Marta was on her feet, mouth agape. Everyone turned to her. She sat back down slowly. What had happened? Had they forgotten about her? Didn't she count? Then why was she sitting in this courtroom?

"I understood," the judge said, "that Sammy's present foster parent is willing to care for him."

Susan sighed and looked at Marta. "I have some reservations about this placement," she said. "But I don't know if this is the place to air them."

"Where better than here?"

"Marta Cummings," Susan said, "has been very responsible about contacting me and Mrs. Grey for help when problems with Sammy arise. And they seem to arise quite often. This week I have spoken with her several times."

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It's what you're there for! Marta thought.

"Mrs. Cummings," the therapist went on, "frequently complains to me about Sammy's behavior. She asks for reasons and labels. I have discussed this with Sammy's social worker and it is our—my—belief that Sammy's hope lies in love, not in labels."

"May I speak?" Marta realized that was her own voice. She stood behind the mahogany railing, leaning against it, sure her knees would give out and she would literally fall in disgrace. "I need to answer that."

"You will have your turn," the judge said.

"When I'm on the stand I'll only be able to answer the questions put to me, and no one will ask me the right questions."

"You are not on trial, Mrs. Cummings."

"Oh, I am. Please. Please may I respond to what Susan has just said?"

"All right," the judge said. "But be brief and to the point."

Marta closed her eyes for a second, saw Ezra and Sammy in their yellow raincoats walking into school this morning, felt Sammy's arms around her neck, his fear, his voicelessness.

"It seems to me," Marta began, "that my job is to care for Sammy. To do the best I can. Susan and Belinda's jobs are the same, and also to support me, to help me do mine. I've never been a foster parent before and I have questions. It's their job to answer them. Sammy has a lot of problems—I don't always understand his behavior. I don't think I should be criticized or Sammy's future jeopardized because I admit to what I don't know."

"That's only part of it," Susan said. "In all our conversations, Marta, you've never told me how much you love Sammy."

"What?"

"You've never told me you love him."

Marta let go of the rail. For the first time since she entered the courthouse seven months ago, perhaps for the first time in her life, she was fearless, cold, clear. "I don't have to account to you for my feelings, Susan. Your job is to help Sammy with his, not judge me for feelings I have or don't have. I'm not going to call you up to tell you how much I love Sammy. I do love him. I've helped him when no one else would. I *rescued* him. I've come to court over and over. No one else has been willing to bring him into their home."

Susan sat still for a moment, eyes closed in her pinched white face. "I apologize," she said. "I should have asked you how you felt instead of feeling inundated by your concerns. But I'm worried that

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Sammy doesn't feel equal to Ezra, and so he doesn't feel secure in your love—in your house."

Marta started to answer, but the judge held up her hand. "I believe it's your turn to testify next, Mrs. Cummings. I want no more speaking out of turn."

Marta crossed the carpeted floor to the witness chair, her legs watery, her stomach unreliable. The afternoon light threw the corners of the room into a darkness she imagined filled with her mistakes and the unfavorable opinions of others. Lurking in those corners were her failure to protect Sammy, her failure to convince Belinda and Susan of her goodness and ability, her failure to be strong enough. She stepped up to the chair, certain that when she turned and faced the room her eyes would illuminate her shortcomings for all in the room to see as clearly as she saw them. She took a deep, audibly shaky breath and sat down. The judge, wearing a floral perfume Marta would remember for the rest of her life, smiled at her.

"Now, Mrs. Cummings, it's your turn."

Jerry Lenihan leaned forward and rested his hands on the rail before her—wide, square hands with big knuckles. "Mrs. Cummings. While it is agreed that Miss Spencer hasn't visited her son since he was placed with you, isn't it true that she often wrote to him?"

The letters Marta had so carefully kept over the months rested on her knees. She had imagined them comforting her here in the courtroom, but instead they saddened her. These letters were Christine's best efforts toward her son, her only contact with him. They should remain private, as should Sammy's rage and despair each time Marta read one to him. Yet here they sat, waiting for her to reveal them. She held out the bundle, secured with a rubber band.

"I brought Christine's letters to Sammy with me," she answered.

"No!" Christine rose to her feet and glared at Marta. "Those letter were to Sammy. Just for him!"

Marta turned to the judge. "Sammy can't read well. He asked me to read them to him."

"She's out to get me," Christine said. "She wants Sammy for herself!"

The judge looked at Christine kindly. "Miss Spencer, I realize that this is difficult for you, but it's my job to find out what will be best for you and your son." She turned to Marta. "What is in these letters?"

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"No! I won't allow it!"

"Miss Spencer," the judge said, "that decision rests with me."

"No!" Christine shouted.

For an irrational moment, Marta wanted to reach down and put her arms around Christine. "I suggest, Miss Spencer," the judge said, "that you be seated."

Marta's heart thudded and she struggled with the rubber band, trying to decide which letter to select. She knew from the envelopes which were which—she had spent hours reading and rereading them, trying to discover more about the woman who had written them and more about the little boy who had received them. Some were simple notes: "I'm in San Francisco at the Mark Hopkins Hotel. You'd love it here." Others were far more sinister—but all of them had sent Sammy screaming to his room, crying because he was separated from her, and because he might be returned to her.

Marta held the letters to the judge. "I don't know which to read."

"Read the top one."

She pulled it out of its envelope. The sepia-tinted card showed hoboes camped beside a train in the Depression. Marta opened the card. Her throat felt dry and flooded at the same time, and when she started to read her voice wobbled.

" 'My dear Samuel,' " the letter began. " 'I hope you like the picture on the card. These were brave men who traveled around the country because they had no homes. Remember when we had a home, you and I? Now we don't have one any more because of you, because you went to live with Marta. I am homeless, Sammy, because of your friends. *Your* friends, Samuel. I hope you will be very happy with your new mother.' "

Marta looked up. Christine rocked back and forth in her seat, her head jerking in a rhythmic tic to one side.

"Your Honor," Hajakian said, "I don't see what purpose this serves."

Marta opened the next letter quickly. " 'Sam,' " she read, " 'this is your mother. Do you remember me? I remember you. But I think maybe you have forgotten me. I wish you were with me, little worm. We'd have breakfast in bed. I'd rub you all over. I'm still a young woman. I could teach you so much. I met a new man last night. His name is Rudi. He's nothing compared to you. Remember me, your darling mommy.' "

"I object!" Hajakian said. "My client doesn't know—"

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"Let her read them!" Christine spoke over him. "Let the bitch read them all!"

"Your Honor," Hajakian pleaded.

The judge looked from him to Christine. "Miss Spencer, why do you want these letters read? A moment ago you were objecting."

Christine shook her head. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Miss Spencer?"

Hajakian said, "Your Honor, may I approach the bench?"

Judge Mora nodded and the lawyer leaned toward her and started to whisper. Marta, seated next to them, waited to be told to step down, but no one addressed her. "Psychiatric observation," she overheard the lawyer say. "Perhaps, but—" The judge's voice dropped and Marta couldn't make out what came next. Then she saw Christine look up through her tears and give her the finger.

"That's enough!" The judge had seen.

"Please reconsider my suggestion," Hajakian said to the judge.

"*What* suggestion?" Christine asked. "What *suggestion?*" Her voice rose hysterically.

"Your attorney has suggested," Judge Mora said, "that you undergo psychiatric observation."

"Damn you!" Christine shrieked at Hajakian. "You're fired!"

"Miss Spencer!" he objected.

"Fired! Hired, fired, now we're mired! *Go!*" She rose, spun around the defense table, and stood in front of the judge. Marta, looking down at Christine's heaving shoulders, her sweaty neck, the blue-black spikes of her dyed hair, felt the fear rising off her.

"Miss Spencer," the judge said, "while you may appear without counsel, I must advise you not to. If you go against my advice, I will do everything in my power to protect your rights, but I urgently suggest you either rehire your lawyer or permit me to appoint a different one for you."

Christine declined with a sullen shake of her head.

"Please speak up, Miss Spencer," the judge told her. "The court stenographer can't record a shake of the head."

"——— you," Christine said.

"You refuse counsel?" Judge Mora's voice had become ominously patient. "Let the record show that Miss Spencer has waived her right to an attorney."

Jerry Lenihan was on his feet. "Your Honor—this case will drag on forever."

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Why? Marta wanted to interrupt. Wasn't it clear enough? What more could they need?

"Surely you are aware, Mr. Lenihan, that the defendant has the right to appear pro se," the judge said. "In which case, I must protect her rights to a fair hearing."

"What about the rights of the child?" Marta asked.

Judge Mora wheeled on her. "I am endeavoring to look out for the child *and* the mother. And I will not be challenged by a witness."

Christine ran over and stood before Marta. "Give the letters to me."

"No." Marta had the eerie sense that Christine was made of electricity.

"Miss Spencer!" The judge hammered her gavel.

"Give them to me!"

"No!"

Christine reached up and grabbed the letters. Marta hung on.

"Bailiff!" the judge called.

Christine's nails dug into the paper, into Marta's hand, and she wrenched the letters away. Marta sat back with a snap, her hand bleeding, her heart slamming in her chest.

In the center of the floor, Christine held out the letters. "These are mine and Sammy's!" She pulled the rubber band off. "They don't belong to you—you can't have them!" She tore them up and hurled them at Marta, the large, jagged pieces fluttering to the floor.

"Am I still on this case?" Hajakian asked the judge.

"No!" Christine shouted.

"No," the judge agreed.

The lawyer stuffed his papers into his case and left, followed by the bailiff, who returned with an armed guard. The judge motioned them to wait by the door.

"Are you all right?" the judge asked Marta. "We can recess—"

"I have copies of the letters." Marta removed them from the file on her lap and handed them to the judge. In spite of the pounding of her heart and the fear that brought swirls of stars in front of her eyes, Marta felt strong, powerful. She handed the judge a photograph.

"This is of Christine with two men, naked."

"You can't do this!" Christine screamed. *"I won't stand for it!* Listen, Your Honor, listen! Marta is a dangerous woman. She takes orders from high places, high faces. She clones Sammys. There's one Sammy in her house, in her bed, but there are Sammys she sends

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all over the country—in bus terminals, in airports. She crates them, mates them. Round my Sammys up! Issue an all-points bulletin!" She flashed a look at Marta, then back at Judge Mora. "You won't, though. You're with her. Okay. Okay. I know when I'm licked, tricked. He's yours. You win. Good luck, lovies, and goodbye."

In seconds she was gone. The heavy door to the courtroom swung shut behind her. The guard started to follow.

"Let her go, bailiff." The judge slumped into her seat. "Let her go."

Marta sat in the car. The courthouse windows reflected the coppery evening sky.

Permanent foster care. Christine had no more legal claim on Sammy. The judge, pale and exhausted, had explained that it was unlikely Christine would ever regain custody, though she could appeal every six months, unless Sammy was adopted. For now, he was safe. The Department had legal custody, Marta had physical custody. Sammy was hers.

She put the car in gear and drove slowly out of town. Every puddle, every leaf, every carved pumpkin on every stoop filled her with pleasure. She wanted to stop and tell everyone she passed that Sammy was safe, that she had won, that she had done something good and remarkable and difficult. The only equivalent moment in her life had been when, after a thirty-hour labor, she had delivered Ezra, to the cheers of the delivery-room staff and to Darren's praise.

There were no cheers now, and no praise, as she steered the Subaru up the Cliff road toward home. Only her memory of Judge Mora and Belinda and the lawyers' businesslike words as they worked out the details of Sammy's custody, their brusque handshakes and parting statements of good luck echoing Christine's eerie "Good luck, lovies, and goodbye."

Marta would have to tell the boys matter-of-factly. She wished there was someone waiting at home to celebrate with her, someone who would know what this meant to her, who would hold her and praise her and help her think out what to do next.

At the stand of Sitka pines, she pulled over as she had this morning and took out of her coat pocket the note Dan Flynn had given her. It was dark now and she turned on the overhead light to read it again.

Whatever happens, I will always admire your concern for a troubled child . . .

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The house glowed through the trees as she drove down the dirt road. The boys and Willie Tey, their babysitter, had finally finished carving their pumpkins and, days late, set them on the stoop, lit from within with candles.

The door flew open and Sammy and Ezra ran to her, their faces smeared with chocolate. Ruckus bumped his way between them, barking.

"What happened?" Sammy asked. "Why didn't the judge want to see me?"

"Dad called," Ezra said. "He wants you to call him. Shut up, Ruckus."

"Shut up, Ruckus." Sammy smacked him on the muzzle. The dog yelped.

"Don't hit him, jerk!" Ezra shouted.

"Sammy—" Marta grabbed his hand "—everything's okay. I'll tell you in a minute. Just let me get inside."

The house smelled of baking.

"Willie and us made a cake," Sammy said. "We c'operated."

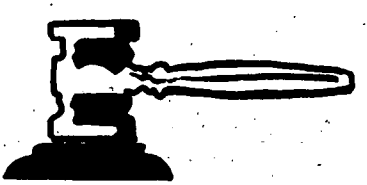
"Hi." Willie, his red hair tied back with a piece of Marta's yellow yarn, was washing dishes. "You got a mess of phone calls. I wrote most of 'em down. These guys tell you we made a cake? Want some?"

"What happened?" Sammy tugged Marta's arm.

She knelt and pulled him to her. "The judge says you're going to go on living with us, Sam."

Sammy reached up and touched her face. Behind him, Ezra looked at her steadily.

"We won't have to keep going to court," she told him over Sammy's shoulder, trying to keep the apology out of her voice. "Things will settle down now. We can get on with our lives. It's going to be all right, Ez. You'll see."



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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

As I've observed in the past, science and mystery fiction overlap in authorship and readership. An example of the former is Lloyd Biggle, Jr., whose crime-related novels to date have mostly been space operas.

But now Biggle comes firmly to earth—Ohio, in fact—in *Interface for Murder* (Doubleday, $12.95). Jay Pletcher, an investigator for Lamber and Associates, finds himself in Sparta, a middling city of conservative tendencies, assigned to solve a case not normally within the purview of a nationally known agency. Sparta College has been visited by the Slasher, who seems to take most delight in cutting clothes. But then a high-school kid who says he's programmed his computer to identify the Slasher is murdered. An agreeable and amusing tale, with an interesting cast.

Gothic Pursuit by John Malcolm (Scribners, $14.95) brings back banker and art-and-antiques buyer Tim Simpson for his fifth adventure. Here he's interested in a reported desk by Nineteenth Century furniture designer Richard Norman Shaw. While following the trail, he trips over a fresh corpse. The Shaw piece, if it exists, would be worth enough to excite terminal greed, as a further corpse or two (with Simpson bidding fair to be among them) proves. This is the usual engaging romp, full of lore of the collecting mania.

Bill Crider's second about Sheriff Dan Rhodes of Blacklin County in Texas is *Shotgun Saturday Night* (Walker, $16.95). Bert Ramsey, a Blacklin handyman, comes in with some boxes he found in a trash pile. The boxes contain a multiplicity of unmatched human limbs. And if that weren't enough, just as a rational and not very criminous explanation for these findings arrives on the scene Ramsey is dispatched by shotgun. Meanwhile, a crew of motorcyclists has arrived in the county, and widower Dan is exploring unexpectedly tender feelings about Ivy Daniel, a vigorous lady about his age. All this comes together quite agreeably, with Rhodes a very human and believable fellow.

Alice Chetwynd Ley, British author of contemporary and historical romances, adds detection to the Regency scene in *A Fatal Assignation* (St. Martin's, $15.95). This is the second appearance (after *A Reputation Dies*) for Justin Rutherford, eligible bachelor, person of Quality, scholar of antiquities, and sleuth. Sir Aubrey Jermyn, dedicated womanizer, has disappeared, and discreet inquiries seem in order. Justin is just the man for the job. So on behalf of Aubrey's wife (and his ward, the delectible Charlotte), Rutherford seeks to find out which of Jermyn's low entanglements produced his death. A pleasant period piece.

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Max Allan Collins wrote a quartet of paperback novels about Quarry, a professional hit man, during the 1970s. Now he revives the character in *Primary Target* (Foul Play, $14.95). Quarry left the trade, retired to a resort hotel in Wisconsin, married, and became an expectant father. But someone tracks him down and offers $1 million for a killing, a political killing. That's the worst kind, and Quarry has neither interest nor need for money. He says no. But that means that a live Quarry is a loose end. Better a dead Quarry, someone thinks. Someone who hires the job out to folks much less competent than Quarry. That's a serious mistake. *Target* is crisp, very tense and tricky—read it.

Colin Dexter's seventh case for Inspector Morse is *The Secret of Annexe 3* (St. Martin's, $15.95), which serves up a neatly surprising narrative. A New Year's celebration at a just-expanded hotel yields one unexpected product: a corpse. The holiday revels seem to have attracted quite a few people not what they seem, so guests are in doubt, not to mention the identity and time of the death of the deceased. A knotty puzzle for Morse, with some serious personal temptation along the path as well. If only he can view the affair from the right end.

Fort's Law (Doubleday, $12.95), the tenth crime novel by Indiana jurist Joe L. Hensley, is a polished treat, with a good surprise at the end. Jack Fort was a successful lawyer in Chicago, but he dropped out of that rat race and into a modest practice in a modest Indiana city. He's court-appointed to defend Jesse DeAlter, charged first with drug peddling and then with the murder of his rich aunt. The prosecutor plans to build his political career on DeAlter's conviction, and he can be a vicious opponent. On the other hand, it would be foolish to underestimate Fort.

Milo Turner, con man of uncounted identities, reappears in *The Ninety Million Dollar Mouse* (Walker, $16.95) by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. Here a complete stranger strolls into Turner's allegedly impregnable home, reveals a chillingly comprehensive knowledge of Turner's career and personae, and induces him with wads of cash to help prove that a wealthy entrepreneur's will is invalid. This takes Turner into the deadly maw of the Drakean Union, a cult manufactured by an Illinois businessman and grown rich and powerful. A gripping tale, strongly told, with a nicely twisty plot.

Roy Hart launches a new series—already a second has appeared in England—about Detective Superintendent Roper in *Seascape with Dead Figures* (St. Martin's, $13.95). This is a good beginning, with effective characterization and the wintry English seacoast well caught. George Winterton was Redbury's benefactor, spreading his wealth and personal energies here and there in the town. His death under suspicious circumstances turns over a rock, exposing rot and intrigue and greed. Probing behind crumbling facades, Roper finds murder and much more.

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ON OUR COVER

Sharon Gless and Tyne Daly have both won Emmys for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series for their performances as Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey on *Cagney & Lacey*. Sharon Gless (cover, left) was born in Los Angeles and is a fifth-generation Californian. After two years at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, she decided she wanted a career in business and after attending secretarial school she went to work for an advertising agency. Her next job was as a production assistant on an independent movie. It was during this period that she made the decision to try for an acting career and began dramatic training with Estelle Harmon. Less than a year later, she was signed to a contract at Universal Studios.

Tyne Daly was born in Madison, Wisconsin, daughter of actress Hope Newell and the late actor James Daly. The family moved around a great deal before settling in Suffern, New York. After a year at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, she begged her family to allow her to pursue an acting career. She commuted from home every day by bus between Suffern and New York City, where she attended the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. She is married to director-actor Georg Stanford Brown. They have formed their own production company, Mexus Productions, Inc. They have three children and celebrate their 22nd wedding anniversary on June 26th.

"Q"

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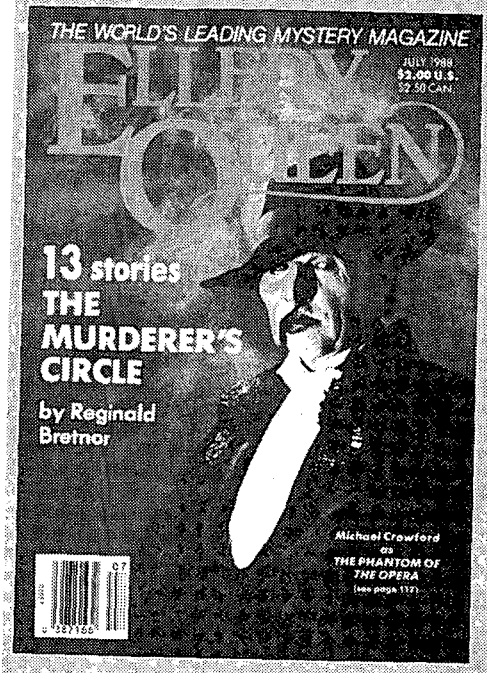

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a *NEW* short story by

ELIZABETH BYRD

Before Anne Baxter played—superbly—the evil and disruptive Eve Harrington in All About Eve, *she played—superbly—an evil and disruptive young woman named Evelyn in the movie version of Hagar Wilde and Dale Eunson's play* Guest in the House. *Such characters can be the greatest fun for actors to take on, for audiences to watch, and for readers to read about.*

So here we have young Barry, charming and talented, contemptuous and posturing, at twenty-four looking thirty, mysteriously home from London for an indefinite stay with his parents and grandmother in Yorkshire . . .

PRODIGAL GRANDSON

by ELIZABETH BYRD

I was on the back porch plucking the pheasant I'd shot when Gladys came out and sat on the upper step.

"Thanks, Mum," she said. "It's a beauty. How shall we stuff it?"

"Sage, onions, and oats are all we've got," I said. "If his Lordship doesn't fancy it, he can fly back to London and dine at the Savoy."

"You'll never like Barry, will you?"

I'm no play-actress but I tried, for her sake. "He's my grandson and it wouldn't be natural to judge him—just because he's different from me."

Actually, I loathed him. He was a right mess and always had been. Even as a little lad, he was a liar and a thief. Now he was probably broke or he wouldn't be coming home to us plain Yorkshire folk. But I didn't want to spoil my daughter's happiness. Her prodigal son, returning, would have the plump pheasant, if not the fatted calf. I'd do all I could to make him welcome, but I wouldn't be home much.

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I'm midwife to the village and I vet, too, but today I'd made time to bake Barry's favorite apple crumble and I'd made a Trifle with sherry and all.

Gladys said, "He probably won't be staying long. Anyway, I'll take over the cooking tomorrow."

And serve him breakfast in bed with a flower on the tray. "What time does his plane get in?"

"Six. Ian will meet it in Manchester and it's a fair drive here, so we'll have tea—I mean, dinner—about eight."

Even at fifteen, Barry had been contemptuous of country folk who called the evening meal tea. What a posturing ass he'd been, imitating Oxford accents from the telly and trying to look like pop stars or actors in the flicks. When he was eighteen, Gladys inherited two thousand pounds from her cousin Sue and spent much of it on Barry's clothes. They'd go to the best tailor in York. Ian, her husband, never objected—he loved her too much. Only I knew that their son was a bitter disappointment to him.

Gladys went inside to set the table (our good china, candles, and all) and after I'd cleaned the pheasant I lit a cigarette and stared out at the moors. Now, in October, they were like a rough grey-brown blanket quilted by woods in the distance. There were no houses in sight, no sound but the cry of curlews. A far cry from the sparkle of London. Again I wondered why Barry wanted to visit.

He rarely wrote and I suspected that when he did, it was a request for money, which of course Gladys would provide. In fact, we did have money, enough to be comfortable. I had my two jobs and Bert had left me life insurance. Ian doctored the community. Gladys was a clever housewife, and with a good head for figures took care of the income tax, the budget, and paying the bills. It was a contented family.

But for long? Well, perhaps Barry had changed in the five years since he'd left to "make his fortune." Miracles do happen.

An hour later, I was out of the shower and into my best trousers and blue sweater. Gladys and I were so different. Each week she had her hair done in the village. I cut mine with sheep shears if scissors weren't handy. I needed only two dresses, for weddings and funerals. Fussy clothes look ridiculous on a figure thin as a leek. But thin as I am, I'm strong as most men my age—sixty-four—and my hands are powerful as a man's, good for pulling out babies and stoppered calves. I know what folk say about me: "Emma Clett may

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be a hard woman, but she's a good, hard worker." And I am. After Bert died, no man came courting and no wonder. I have the sex appeal of a flatiron.

Downstairs in the living room, Gladys said, "Why, Mum, you're not going to dress up?"

For Barry? Hell, no. But I said I'd be doing the cooking and was comfortable in this gear. "You look champion," I told her, and she did. Her hair is still gold, she wore a gold-cashmere sweater, gold earrings, and a long russet skirt. She knows how to put on makeup so that even fake eyelashes look real. Our Gladys is a pretty woman.

She had made a fire so that the room was cosy with its old brown-leather chairs and sofa, maroon carpet and drapes. We sat on the sofa and she said, "I'm worried about the wine. Ian and I don't know about vintages, but he said chablis goes with pheasant. I'll ask Barry to mix the cocktails."

My, we *were* fancy tonight. And of course Barry would know the latest cocktails. But to do him credit, he wasn't, or hadn't been, much of a drinker. I think he drank to be posh or "with it." Not like the hearty topers at our local. Many's the time I've had to deal with drunken farmers fallen over a stile or from a hayloft. (If they were in bad shape, I'd use my beeper and call Ian from the surgery.)

Well, Gladys was so nervous you'd have thought she expected the Queen, going in to readjust the dining-room table and wishing we had roses instead of asters. Then we heard Ian's car drive up and she ran to the door.

I heard Barry say, "Dahling!" in the hall, then Ian came in. He was carrying Barry's red suitcase (too big for a brief visit, I thought) and took it upstairs. Barry came in as I stood up.

"And how's our Emma?" he asked. "Not a day older, by the look of you." He was mimicking our Yorks accent and it wasn't funny to me, but I smiled and accepted his peck on the cheek. "No," he said, "you don't look your age, luv."

But he had aged. At twenty-four, he looked thirty. His straight, brassy-yellow hair and the darting grey eyes were the same, but under the eyes were wirelike wrinkles and his mouth had thinned to a string. Tension, I thought, a face full of stress—and when we sat on the sofa and he offered me a cigarette, I noticed the bitten fingernails.

Smoking, I coughed on the cigarette and he said, "You've never had a Gauloise? I became addicted in Paris, smoke nothing else."

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Gladys asked him to mix cocktails but he said, "Not for me. I stick to Glenlivet."

Trust him to want an expensive malt. From the doorway Ian said, "I'm afraid all we have is Vat 69."

"Oh, it'll do," he said. The bloody condescension!

Ian brought our drinks and Barry stretched his legs toward the fire. He was wearing a grey pin-striped suit, blue shirt and tie, and grey-suede loafers. As always, he was neat, but with socks matching tie and handkerchief. Maybe that was the style in London, but I thought he looked a bit of a spiv.

Ian, sipping his drink, said, "Tell them about the telly, son."

"Well, I haven't signed the contract yet, but BBC wants me to do a pilot show in November for my own comedy series."

Some people thought him amusing so it *could* be true. But he'd always been a compulsive liar. He'd even lied for no reason, like saying he'd stopped for tea with Mrs. Whipple when we knew she was visiting in Leeds. No motive for it—he just enjoyed inventing things.

"So I've come for a holiday to rest up before it all becomes frantic. You've no idea what a ratrace TV can be."

So he told us peasants. Gladys, of course, was thrilled and predicted terrific success but Ian merely nodded, doubtless as skeptical as I. Big, bluff, tolerant Ian—I really love that man and so do his patients. Not a mean bone in his body, as they say.

After dinner, which Barry said was "quate" good, and the wine "rather interesting," he retired upstairs early and so did Gladys. Alone by the fire with Ian, I said, "Did he say how long he plans to stay?"

"No." He relit his pipe, which he smoked only at home. "It can't be long if he really has to be back for the November audition."

"Do you think it's true?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. He's clever. He's glib, always has been. Do you remember the chocolate-biscuit episode?"

"Yes." At five, Barry had sneaked some from the kitchen jar when he knew he had only to ask for them. We said, "Why did you do it?" but he insisted the cat had. Ian said we'd just test Puss and crumbled a biscuit, and of course she sniffed and turned away. But Barry wasn't fazed. "That's because she ate too many and got sick. I cleaned it up."

"But more serious later," Ian mused, "not mere mischief."

Shillings left for the milkman disappeared, and change for the

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paper boy. But he was shrewd enough to hide his loot, not to buy anything or steal too often. But even Gladys had to admit his dishonesty when he doctored a report card from a C to a B and an F to a B—the little sod even got the same color ink. He never thought Gladys would see Miss Miller in the post office and say how well he'd improved in arithmetic and history.

Ian said, when I mentioned that, "I thought he'd never forget the verbal whipping I gave him. But when he left here for London, fifty pounds from my wallet departed, too."

I leaned forward. "My God, you never told me!"

"Nor Gladys. Why disillusion her and upset you. Surprised?"

"Not really. He took two fivers from my handbag that morning, though he had plenty to last him 'til he found work—and all the clothes Gladys bought him. To steal from his own family!"

"In a way," he said, "Alice is part of the family—the rich part. When she wrote that she'd look after him in London I began to worry. Not about him—after all, he was nineteen—but about her. I thought about it for a long time but finally I wrote her and told her not to lend him money and to be very careful about cash lying around when he visited her."

"And she replied?"

"She didn't want Gladys to see a letter, so she phoned me at work. She said she'd known for years that he was a born con man with all the charm such men develop, but thus far he'd behaved himself, had lodgings in a theatrical boarding house, and was intent on dramatic school. You know the rest."

Yes. Alice wrote us that he had unusual talent and she wanted to pay the cost of dramatic school. We said we'd pay, but she insisted, said she had more money than she'd ever need, what with Henry leaving her half a million. So we agreed. But Barry told us he had a scholarship.

"So he had the two years' training, but what's he been doing since?"

"Any work necessary to support his extravagances," Ian said wearily. "I'm going to have a private talk with him and tell him we know the truth and he's got to repay Alice."

"And he'll smile and agree that when he gets on television he'll repay her with interest."

Ian sighed. "*Gladys* will believe it."

We were silent, both depressed. Except on special occasions, we never think of a drink but Ian went to the kitchen and came back

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with nightcaps. We cheered up a bit, discussing our jobs, my amusement at being paid with a bushel of potatoes by the widow Ellis and Gladys' delight that they were King Edwards—priceless in our area and the best in the world for Stovies.

"Tomorrow I'll be at the farms all day," I said. "The hoof-and-mouth scare—it's probably just the annual rumor." I got up, took our empty glasses to wash. "Sleep well, Ian."

"You, too."

And I did sleep well. But when I got up at seven, I hid pound notes in *Natural Childbirth*. Barry wouldn't flip through my bedroom bookcase. There was nothing of value in my bureau drawers or wardrobe.

After breakfast with Gladys and Ian—Barry still asleep—I took my landrover and began a tour of the farms. As I'd suspected, the disease was a false alarm. Vets are privileged to huge noon dinners, cider, and buttermilk out in the fields, tea and cake at four. A wonder I don't gain weight. Anyway, when I got home I had no appetite and, avoiding Barry, went up to rest while they ate. Lucky I did because Ella Martin's husband phoned to say she had started her pains. But it was quick labor—her fourth child—and I was home three hours later.

Gladys was reading and said, as I started up to bed, "Ian and Barry are at the pub. He's had such a good time today. We shopped in the village and Barry remembered everybody, greeted them by name. Even the girls who have married fluttered around him." Boys had never bothered with him because he didn't like sports. "He has so many invitations."

"Good," I said. He'd be out at night.

And he was. I suppose our village isn't more credulous than others, and the idea that a potential telly star was among them—what a thrill.

One afternoon when Gladys and Barry were in Bradford, Alice's white Jaguar drove up.

"Hi," she said as I opened the door to greet her. "I had to go to York so I thought I'd surprise you."

I'm not much for kissing, but I was so glad to see her after so long. If Barry had changed, she hadn't—still darkly beautiful at forty, sleek in her tweeds. Following me into the living room, she said, "Where's Gladys?"

"Out with Barry. They drove to—"

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"Barry! Is *he* here? If I'd known I wouldn't have come."

"It's all right. They won't be back before dark. I'll bring tea and then we'll talk."

She had known this house as a girl when she'd lived at Danver Bridge, so she knew her way upstairs. While she freshened up, I made tea and sandwiches and stirred up the fire.

Seated on the sofa, she said, "Nothing has changed here, thank God. Even to the scent of lavender in the towel closet and the lavender soap." Then, tasting a ham sandwich: "Ryer's smoked gammon?"

"He's never lost the art."

As always, she took her tea without milk or sugar. "How long has Barry been here?"

"Over a week. Don't try to spare my feelings. What has he been up to that you don't want to see him?"

"He's secretive, so I don't know all of it. But more than enough. I should have guessed he'd hide out here. Three weeks ago I got him a job with Richard Stevens at the Haymarket Theater, moving stage props. If he worked out, he'd have to join the union. I thought the work might lead to something in the theater. Well, it did. Within three days, he'd stolen five hundred pounds from Richard's room backstage during a lunch break. Oh, so innocent—he stayed on another few days until he contrived to drop a barrel on his foot—then he phoned in about a broken bone."

"But didn't Stevens call the police?"

"Yes, he did. But not to break Gladys' heart, I told Richard that Barry had been with me during his lunch break, so he wasn't even questioned."

"Did Barry admit the theft to you?"

"Of course not. He said, 'It was nice of you to say that, but I wouldn't dream of a vile thing like that. I've missed money, too, and I think they'll catch up with Harry Blane.' "

Alice accepted my offer of a cigarette. "Anyway, it's very suspicious that he phoned to say he was off to Paris, his foot was better and he had a job offer there. I'm sure he worried that the police would come after him after all, that I might rat on him."

I said, "Do you think he went to Paris?"

"I'm pretty sure. It's a fine way to spend five hundred pounds. And now he's hiding out here, broke."

I asked her about the television audition. She thought it a pack of lies. If it was true, he'd have bragged to her. "Look, Emma," she

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said, "there isn't time to tell you how many people he's hurt over these past five years. Because he's charming and talented, I introduced him to friends of mine and almost always it was a disaster. Even a girl's suicide. Someday I'll tell you about that, but—" she looked out at the darkening sky "—I'd better leave. Oh, I was such a damned fool to have him meet Stevens."

"You've been an angel," I said as I helped her on with her coat, "but it's time to stop. Enough is enough."

"Right. Keep an eye on him, Emma. He's always up to something."

"I know. But when he's left here, will you come up for a good long visit?"

"Just phone me when."

I saw her out to her car and waved her away. When Ian came in, I wouldn't mention her visit or upset him with something neither of us could handle. Tomorrow he was looking forward to a medical conference in York and reading a paper there. Why spoil his pleasant three days?

Wind rose as I sat by the fire, smoking and thinking. Moor folk are accustomed to its screams but this evening it made me uneasy. Alice never exaggerated. If Barry was still hurting people now, he'd go on doing it, and at the moment *we* were vulnerable.

Ian phoned to say he had to make an emergency call at Brewster Farm and not to expect him to tea. Then Gladys and Barry came in and prattled about the fun they'd had in Bradford. "Mum likes the antique shops but I get a hoot out of the people," Barry said. "Emma, would you like an aperitif before dinner?"

He meant a sherry. "I don't mind," I said.

Gladys cooked dinner while we drank in the living room. Just to test his reaction, I said, "Who's writing your show?"

"Show? Oh, I am. I left sample scripts with the producer. He thinks they're great. I imitate a lot of people in it, politicians and all." He piled lie on lie. "I do a howl on Maggie Thatcher, wavy blonde wig and bow-tied blouse—"

Next morning when I drove Ian to his train, I asked if he and Barry had had that private talk. Yes, he said, in the pub that second night. Barry had said he certainly intended to repay Alice and had even figured the two years' interest on the debt. "Let's hope it's true, that telly show," Ian said.

I spared him the truth.

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"But you know, he's a mischief-maker. At ten last night, after you went to bed, I had a call from Dorene Hadley—thought she had the flu, temperature a hundred and two. When I agreed to go there, Barry said, 'Oh, I remember Dorene, always game for a tickle and a slap.'

"Gladys said, "She's married now."

" 'Yes,' he said, 'I heard. To a traveling man, never home.' Then he snickered and looked at Gladys. 'Don't worry, Mum. If Dad's late, these things—like the flu—never last long.' "

"The little sod," I said, braking to avoid a hare on the road.

He said, "Snide, vicious—I marvel that Gladys is so besotted. But then, 'mother love—' "

The next two days passed calmly enough, Barry on best behavior. He took out the trash, brought in the wood, tended the living-room fire and those in our bedrooms. On Wednesday he even vacuumed the house and dusted, but I was on the lookout in case he was 'casing' our rooms. Gladys had taken to dressing for tea, long skirts, and Barry never failed to flatter her. This night, before Ian came home, he said, "You didn't used to dress up for dinner."

"In your honor," she said, smiling. "Oh, and in *Ian's* honor, dear, will you pick up four pounds of corned beef in the morning? It's his favorite, with cabbage."

"Just make out a list, dahling."

That phony accent! I said goodnight early and left them arguing—she insisted he shouldn't wash the dishes and he said he'd really enjoy it for a change.

I got into bed with a book. Half an hour passed and then I heard the front door slam. A few minutes later, Gladys came up, tapped on my door, and came in, slumping into a chair. "Oh, Mum, Barry's so furious! He was just *livid.* Because, well, I denied him a loan."

Probably for the first time. "For how much?"

"Fifteen hundred. He says he needs it for costumes for his show. But Mum, he hasn't signed a contract yet and when he does I'm certain the station's costume department will supply them."

"Of course," I said, proud of her. "You did exactly right."

"I said I'd ask Ian if we could lend him a little, say two hundred, but he stalked out in a rage. I'm glad he didn't ask for my car keys—he was too upset to drive and he's a nervous driver to begin with."

"I wonder where he went."

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"I guess he'll walk it off. Remember how when he was moody he'd take to the moors. But I feel so awful about it."

"Go to bed. Do you want a sleeping pill?"

"No." She moved to the door. "I want to stay awake. I'm sure he'll come in to apologize."

And agree to the two hundred. "Of course he will."

She left and I tried to resume reading. The walls aren't thick, and even with her door shut I heard her crying. Poor lass. But, thank God, sensible enough.

An hour and a half later, I heard the door shut below, then his lurching footsteps on the stairs. If he'd been to the pub, the mile walk hadn't sobered him. But Gladys was right. I heard her door open. He'd come to apologize.

There was murmured conversation for a while.

And then Gladys screamed.

I jumped out of bed and hurried across the hall. She was gasping and choking, his hands on her throat. I grabbed the fire poker and hit him hard across the nape of the neck. He slumped to the side of the bed.

Her face was a dusky red, the whites of her terrified eyes spotted with blood. I raised her arms, and as oxygen flowed in her skin gradually paled to normal.

"You'll be all right," I told her. "I'm going to give you a shot."

I hurried into my room, and brought back the medical bag. "Hold out your arm." She did, steady against the needle, then, when I'd cleaned the puncture, she pointed to Barry.

"He's only stunned," I said. "I'll bring him round. Then I'll drive him to the train."

Her eyebrows raised.

"There's the mail train that leaves at midnight. I'll see he's on it, with money and all for London."

There were tears in her eyes, but she nodded and I took her car keys from the bureau. "In five minutes, you'll be out like a light. Eight hours, I'd think."

As she lay back on the pillow, I dragged Barry to his feet. "Walk," I said.

He felt his neck and mumbled that it hurt.

"I didn't ask you to walk on your neck," I told him. "Come on."

I helped him into my room and out of his jacket. "Now lie down. I'll bring up an ice pack and a whisky and you'll be fine."

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He lay down on his stomach, his head on my pillow. I dressed with record speed, pocketed Gladys' car keys, and took his jacket to his room. He always kept his wallet in a breast pocket. There was ten pounds in it, a bit of change, and a driver's license. I tossed the wallet into the closet, then packed the jacket in his suitcase with his other clothes, searching them for identification, but there was none. There *was* an address book and I threw it in the closet as well. Then I took a quick trip to the bathroom for his shaving stuff and toothbrush and, shoes and slippers packed, I zippered the suitcase and carried it down to the garage.

There, I took my double-barreled shotgun from the rack and placed it in the back seat of the car, hidden by an old plaid blanket. The suitcase went on the floor. In front, I checked the glove compartment for a flashlight—it was there.

Back in the house, I went to the hall where we hung our coats and searched the pockets of his. I removed our door keys but left his cigarettes, lighter, and handkerchief. I didn't bother with the ice pack I'd promised him but poured a small whisky and took the glass up to my room. He hadn't stirred.

Gently, I turned him over. "Sorry, there's no ice made. Sit up and drink this."

Groggily, he obeyed. He was sober now, and this was simply meant to be a friendly gesture. He sipped and rubbed his neck.

"You'll be okay," I said, "but we've got to make the midnight train. Ian comes back at noon, and considering what happened I'm doing you a favor to get you out of here."

"Yes." His face twitched. "I meant to leave soon, anyway."

"Drink up and hurry. We've just time."

He got up shakily and said, "My jacket—"

"Is packed with your other clothes in the suitcase in the car. Your coat's downstairs."

"I've only a couple of pounds," he whined, "in my jacket."

"Never mind that, I've got three hundred for you." I snatched my handbag from the closet and he followed me downstairs, where we put on our coats.

"You're sure about the train?" he asked as we got in the car.

"Certainly. It's the mail train—it goes straight through to London."

He was silent as we drove through the darkened moors. Then he said, "I think I'll get off at Colchester and visit a friend for a few days."

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Perhaps scared of the London police, as Alice had said. "Good. And the best oysters in Britain."

He took cigarettes from his coat. "My last pack. I don't suppose they have Gauloise at the station."

"They're sure to in Colchester."

We were silent again. Five miles, seven. He lay back and dozed. Then he woke up. "Where are we? This isn't the road to the station."

"It wasn't five years ago," I said, "but we've got a shortcut now."

Another mile through a rutty road and I parked.

"Oh, Jesus," he said. "Out of petrol?"

"Never mind, I've got a gallon in back."

I pocketed the flashlight, got out, and, opening the rear door, took out the suitcase and gun. Then I went to his side and put down the suitcase.

"Get out." I motioned with the gun.

He screamed as he saw it.

"Get out or I'll shoot through the glass."

He got out, trembling.

"Now carry the suitcase and run straight ahead. I swear I won't shoot."

He didn't hesitate. He picked up the suitcase.

"Now, run!"

He ran, stumbling over whitewashed stones that circled the area. Every shepherd within miles avoids that circle. Warning signs blow down in the winds.

"*Help!*" he shouted.

The quicksand had him.

I put down the gun and beamed the torch on him. As I'd hoped, he clung to the suitcase as a raft, but its weight only sucked him farther in. I didn't enjoy the slow torture, but I had to watch his struggle, listen to his screams, wait until gradually the yellow hair and the red suitcase disappeared.

Back in the car, I drove home. I checked on Gladys, who was deeply asleep, and turned off her light. Then I made a cup of tea and drank it at the kitchen table.

Smoking, I thought, When I'm alone tomorrow I'll rake leaves and burn them with the wallet, driver's license, and address book. It's against the law to burn leaves, but people do it. It's against the law to murder, too, but I feel no guilt.

There's no such thing as a perfect murder, I've read. But whoever

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came up through quicksand? Even if he did, years from now, with no identification but dental work, I'd be dead.

And if I'd been out on a case tonight, Gladys would be dead.

As usual, I slept well, and in the morning took tea and porridge to her. She said, "You got him on the train?"

"Yes."

"You won't tell Ian what happened, *please?*"

"No. Why upset him?"

She shivered. "You don't think Barry will come back?"

"I don't see how he could come back. When he sobered and realized what he'd done."

"Of course, he'd be too ashamed." She sipped her tea. "I won't even watch him when his show starts on BBC. I couldn't bear to see him again, even on film."

"Right. I feel the same."

"Anyway, he requires excitement. He was always bored and restless here."

I nodded. "I think he's had it here."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

DEATH OF A FLAKE

by NELSON

An old desert rat they called Jake
Enjoyed playing games with a snake.
Then a rattler one day
Had a new game to play,
But they say Jake looked swell for his wake.

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"I think I'm about to be a very, very special man," Miller said.

"Keep talking," Rosalind responded. "And tell me later about the problem . . ."

THE PROBLEM

by J. W. WHITEHEAD

It was only in his most private moments that Miller admitted to the mistakes of his life. Outwardly he maintained the appearance of a thriving man, and this appearance made him the envy of his friends and acquaintances. He would tell them, "Things couldn't be better. Life is good." They believed Miller had the Midas touch.

One night he came home from the office and he could feel the wrongness in the air, seeping like gas. The house was dark, the fireplace cold. He called for Tina, but got no answer. He turned on some lights, steeped the ashes and banked a few logs on the hearth, peppered on kindling, and started the fire. Somehow, even though his wife had not answered, he knew she was home. It was as if he could scent her somewhere in the house. Because he knew she was home, he was angry. He went through the rooms of the house slowly, allowing his anger to rise and fall as naturally as his breathing. He found her in the bedroom, blankets heaped over her like sandbags. He stood just inside the doorway, watching her in the artificial moonlight of the streetlamps. Tina was shaking, her face wet with tears.

He struggled, and succeeded, to keep his voice neutral. "I'm home," he said.

His wife shook, opened her eyes, and looked at him, then looked at him some more. Miller thought she looked feverish. "Are you sick?" he said.

She shook her head. At her movement, he smelled faintly her blanketed, waiting sweat. It didn't smell like fever. The smell told him something other than illness, but he couldn't quite determine what it told. "But you're not well," he said.

She made no movement. She lay in the bed like a huddled stone, like an animal frozen by its fear of a more deadly animal.

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"What's wrong with you?" Jack said. He watched her very closely, but without seeming to, the way he watched strangers on the subway after dark. He'd found that was the only way to learn about them.

Miller went for a walk. He felt he'd been more than patient. When he came home at night, he didn't expect a fanfare. Tina didn't have to be in a lacy negligee with a bottle of wine on ice and a three-course dinner simmering in the kitchen. All she had to be was the woman he married.

The streets were quiet, lit by the pink streetlamps. The lamplight illuminated everything with the glow of rose. Miller found that the light could almost animate the tar of the street, the blocks of concrete on the walk, and the rows of dead cars perched against the curbs on either side of the street. There was an optimism to these lights that Miller hadn't seen in them back in his bedroom, as he'd watched their reflection striking his wife's damp face. Yet optimism, he knew, couldn't be in the lights—or the street, sidewalks, and cars. It could only be in him. And optimism was positive thinking—and the power of positive thinking was a myth. The power of positive thinking, thought Miller, was a dead theory. It was self-hypnosis.

For argument's sake, because he liked to argue even with himself, Miller thought of all the amazing things people had accomplished through positive thinking. The rebuttals that presented themselves were myriad. He was very proficient at argument, and the only faculty of his that had suffered as a result was his capacity for belief.

Upon returning home, he found his wife where he'd left her. He switched on the light beside the bed and she shut her eyes and drove her face deeper into her pillow. Miller sat on the edge of the bed. He could feel the vibrations of her shaking as they passed through the mattress into his thighs.

"What should we have for dinner?" he said. He felt the wrongness of the question before he asked it, and asked it anyway.

When he repeated the question, Tina finally gave a frail shrug of her shoulders.

"Aren't you hungry?"

"No," she said. The sound of her voice, so long in coming, was like an insult.

"What's the matter with you?" said Miller, getting up to better show his disgust. He went back to the doorway. "Hello?"

"I hear you," she said. Her voice was small.

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"Then why don't you answer?"

She gave no answer.

The next morning, Miller awoke to an empty bed. He knew Tina was in the house somewhere, but he got ready for work before he went to look for her. She was asleep on the couch, curled very tightly under a worn comforter. A television morning show bubbled softly from across the room. He took one step into the room and she started awake with a cry of what seemed to be pain.

"I guess I'll be getting breakfast out," he said.

"All right," said Tina.

"Did you sleep here?"

"I don't know," she said. "Was I asleep?"

"See you when I get home," Miller told her. "Try to get over this, whatever it is."

"I will," she said, in a voice so small it seemed almost comical.

"How can I believe that?"

"I'm not asking you to." Tina's voice was so far from defiance that Miller just then recognized the smell of sweat still lingering around her. It still carried the scent not of illness, but of fear.

He left without saying goodbye.

Tina's fear distracted him on his way to work. First he missed the turn for the superhighway into the city. Her fear was the unforeseen factor in another mistake of his life. He wondered how long it had been there without his seeing it, and if it had been there before they married. When he finally got on the expressway, he was very late, so he maneuvered immediately into the passing lanes. The car directly in front of him (until he could pass it) had that tiresome homily TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE stuck to its bumper.

The saying had been a particular favorite of Tina's. She had begun their marriage superstitious, optimistic, even expectant. She collected talismans, followed ritual. Yet for all that, she'd never been easily frightened—not when money was tight, not after their house was robbed, not during the false-alarm pregnancy. Later they would find it was a pointless worry about pregnancy—the doctors told them they couldn't have children. He was far more frightened during every crisis—he always supposed because he more intelligently understood their gravity. But her calmness had pleased him, had been an added bonus to the marriage agreement. Around his friends,

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he need only worry about his own appearance. Tina remained unruffled.

Miller was rudely brought to ground a moment later by an olive-green sedan, honking its horn behind him and waving him to the right. He checked his speedometer. He was already traveling seventy-five miles an hour. He wondered how fast this car wanted to go and decided to find out. He would trade places and see if he couldn't push the other car a bit.

Yet when he moved over a lane to the right, the olive car fell in behind him and the driver continued to wave him over. For the first time, Miller gave consideration to the possibility that the car was an unmarked police vehicle. He moved another lane to the right. The other car fell in behind him.

Miller slowed to fifty-five and took a long look in his rearview mirror. The driver of the other car was dangling a badge in front of the windshield and pointing to the shoulder.

Miller pulled across the far right-hand lane and ground to a stop on the gravel pitch of the shoulder. He watched the other car pull in behind him and knew he had to think up a story.

"Do you realize how long it took you to pull over?" The officer stood by Miller's window in full uniform. A flashing caught the corner of Miller's eye. He glanced in the rearview mirror and saw for the first time the small blue egg of light flashing on the olive-green car's dash.

"I'm sorry, officer," said Miller. "I was speeding, I admit that. But the unmarked car—" He paused, fishing, knowing he must convince himself before he could convince the officer. "I was in upstate Ohio a few years ago," he said. "An unmarked car pulled me over and the guy took every cent I had, and my wristwatch as well."

"Uh-huh," said the officer. "Where was this?"

"Upstate Ohio."

"I mean *where?*"

Miller wondered if the man originally hailed from that area. Tina's brother and his wife lived near Lake Erie, in Castalia.

"In Erie County," he said. "Just outside Castalia." The last time Miller had been up there, Tina's brother had mentioned something like that, with the unmarked cars, going on.

"How long ago?" The officer was writing it down. Miller couldn't turn back.

"Hard to say," he said, and paused a moment for dramatic effect. "I suppose it's over two years ago now."

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"Your identification."

Miller worked his wallet from his back pocket, handed it over, and watched the officer slouch back to his car. The odds still seemed fair that it was all a bluff—he imagined it would take some time to radio for such information. Yet Miller was surprised to find that he was willing to argue for his claim, would claim it to any judge or commissioner.

When a moment later the olive car slammed hard into reverse with a protest of tires, shot out onto the road, revealed its missing license plate, and disappeared, Miller could only watch, and marvel at what had just transpired.

The morning was a fog of beliefs and fulfilled desires. He believed he could show up the hotshot gunning for his position and then the circumstances dropped like roulette balls into their seemingly appointed places and he *had* shown up the hotshot, in front of the company vice president. Miller found himself wishing the veep's secretary Rosalind Mercer would strike up a conversation with him. She did, and he invited her to lunch.

At lunch, they tanked up a little on beer. Miller admired Rosalind. She was a big girl, with broad bones and a figure to be pondered rather than filled in. She had lots of hair, falling in thick waves down her back. Tina was so timid, so barren. Miller tried to imagine Rosalind in the attitudes in which he'd seen Tina the past two days. It was impossible.

"I've got a problem," he said to Rosalind.

"Maybe I can help," she said, and raised her eyebrows.

"I think I'm about to be a very, very special man."

"Keep talking," she said. "And tell me later about the problem."

Miller arrived home just in time that evening and found Tina at the stove, pale and drawn, trying to lift a pot full of water.

"Spaghetti," she said.

He looked at his wife, but it was no use and he turned away so he wouldn't be forced to talk to her and hurt her. Yet he couldn't stop himself from saying, "How are you today?" Miller thought about tomorrow, made himself think about tomorrow: he and Rosalind had agreed on a more private luncheon engagement.

"I guess all right."

In his new-found confidence, barreling toward a future he now felt he played an active role in determining, he said, "Really? You

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really feel all right?" He knew it was a mistake, yet couldn't make himself care. "I'm glad you're coming out of it."

What came next struck him as worse than an insult: it was a criticism of what had liberated him. "Actually, I'm scared, not sick," she said. "I was never sick, really." She turned back to the pot, in which the water had begun to boil. She grabbed a fistful of spaghetti, broke it in half, drowned it in the steaming water, and reached for more.

"Of what?" he said.

She didn't answer.

"Of what?" He took her arm, twisted her around to face him, pulled the second fistful of spaghetti from her hand and threw it in the pot. The water raged and he felt the steam settling against the side of his face.

She turned back to the spaghetti when he let go of her arm. He watched the back of her head as she said, "Something. Like there's something in the house, waiting until I forget about it."

"Great," he said. "*The Amityville Horror,* Part Five."

A long silence tore the room like an explosion. Tina stirred the tomato sauce. "Then stop asking," she said.

"Give me a straight answer and you've got it."

"I can't be any straighter about it."

"What is it you're scared of?"

"Beyond what I told you," she said, "I don't know."

Miller turned off the gas jets. They flickered, spit, went silent. "Come on," he said.

"Where?"

"We're going through this house. I'm going to show you there's nothing to be scared of."

They went painstakingly through the house together, room by room. Miller pulled open doors, threw back curtains and bedspreads, forcing her to look under the beds and through the bureaus. Tina followed meekly, aware that what she feared would not be obscured by wood, cloth, or plaster. Yet she didn't want to make things any worse by telling Miller he was wasting his time. At the end of the tour, she was bent nearly double with fear, but she finished cooking the spaghetti and served Miller his dinner in front of the television. Then she threw up and went to bed.

Miller had a raise within a month, and there was talk of a promotion. The new Miller took what he wanted and discarded what

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he didn't, believing it all to be entirely his own choice. Tina languished. Miller noted that her inactivity had made her puffy and pale. She slept on the couch, and whenever he saw her she was shaking. Rosalind, on the other hand, flourished. Both of them were positively energized by their three-a-week private luncheons and emerged flushed from a simple whispered conversation at the coffee machine.

The day Miller decided he loved Rosalind and not Tina was a day of victory for him, perhaps the key victory in the liberation of the new Miller. On his way home, he remembered the olive-green car and laughed with confidence. He was as positive of eventually having Rosalind as he was of any certainty already in his life.

So what awaited him at home was an insult, but not a surprise. He was certain Tina was not in the house when he let himself in the door. The fire was out, but the relics of the logs still glowed and whistled. For the first time, he wondered if he might not understand the fear Tina talked about. The house was unnaturally quiet and seemed as if it would remain so. As he toured the rooms, his pulse quickened and he found himself fearing the worst. He hoped Tina hadn't done anything to hurt herself. He didn't love her, but he certainly wished her no harm.

Their bed was made up, tautened sheets and blanket choking it. He felt the bed. It was cold. He took up her pillow and smelled it. The linens were freshly washed. All scent of her was gone. In the entire house, in fact, the scent of her had gone. For a moment, he experienced the odd sensation that he envied her.

He called Rosalind. "I think Tina's gone," he said.

"What do you mean?" said Rosalind.

"I mean, I think she's left."

"Are her things missing?"

"I don't know—I haven't looked," he said. "I don't need to look."

"Well, then, when can I start moving in?"

"Moving in? Do you think you ought to?"

"Ought to? Why else would I tell her to get out?"

"You told her to get out? When?"

"When not? I've been doing it for weeks. It took until now to get her out. So do I come over tonight or shall I start boxing my stuff?"

"Whichever," Miller said. He sat on the bed with the receiver held dumbly to his ear, and long after he hung up he sat there, scenting the empty house, nodding convincingly for no one.

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A story you won't easily forget by Uruguayan writer Maria de Montserrat, translated by specialist in Latin American Literature Donald A. Yates, who quite rightly refers to it as a small classic. But not for the squeamish . . .

THE SUNDAY BIRD

by MARIA de MONTSERRAT

My best friend is Pepita, the daughter of the coal vendor. I had to do a lot of explaining to my family about this and also had to prove that such a friendship wasn't going to turn me into a dirty, untidy girl and that I wasn't going to lose my good manners or any of the feelings of superiority they have tried to instill in me.

The cleanest place I know, and the coziest, is the back of the coal shop where the vendor's family lives. First you have to pass through all the blackness and soot. But it must be something more than the contrast that makes white whiter where they live than anywhere else.

When Pepita is sick, I love the soft, crinkly sheets that seem to surround her with fragrant and sunny lands when she moves around in her bed. The enameled bedframe doesn't have a single chip and the mosquito net that is gathered up on top inside a bronze crown is arranged like a bride's veil.

I could stay forever in this house, because of the old photographs that hang on the wall, and the windows with the curtains tied back with ribbon bows so you can look out onto the little patio filled with plants. It feels so good to be here, no matter how cold it is outside, and there's always water ready for tea on the coal stove. There's not a lot of talk. The family is kind and relaxed and you can't see at all that they are completely lacking in upbringing, as they say at home.

We're so happy! Today is Saturday and Pepita and I already did our homework for Monday. She helped me with a composition and I helped her with her arithmetic problems. Tomorrow, as we do every Sunday, we'll go to the town market with my Aunt Nélida and besides looking around, eating biscuits, and buying decals as usual, we'll pick out a pretty little bird . . .

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It is a cold but wonderful morning: our cheeks are red, our feet warm, our hands tingling. My Aunt Nélida has bought us each biscuits and a candy cane. We're carrying the basket filled with oranges and she is shielding her face with a bouquet of mixed dahlias from the men, who like to make admiring comments. Next, we are going to the birdseller's stand. The man knows us but he is never very friendly. He looks gloomy and asks: "You want the same as always?" I suggest that this time we get a cardinal—they are so beautiful, especially the ones with a red crest! Please! But my aunt lifts her shoulders the way she does when she doesn't want to answer. The linnets look as if they have just been caught, flying again and again against the wires of the cage. There are other birds that are prettier and not so nervous. "I'm not saying we have to get a canary—that would be asking a lot—but maybe a sparrow? Why not a sparrow?" My aunt raises her shoulders for the second time and I don't dare suggest anything else.

"It'll be the same," I whisper to Pepita, "they don't have the slightest bit of imagination." And here it is. A miserable, shabby linnet. They put it in a paper bag that has a little hole in it for air. I hand it to Pepita. With her free hand, she takes it and carries it carefully.

At my house, we say goodbye until later. But first Pepita wants something. "Would you let me see the linnet cage, ma'am?"

My aunt is about to answer with a harsh word, thinks better of it, and says: "You'd like to see it? Come in, then. Come in."

Pepita walks between us, thrilled. She admires the wicker armchairs, all white and covered in flowered patterns, the palms in their plaster pots, and above all the stained-glass panes in the ceiling that shower down every color that ever existed. I'm happy. I think now that they'll let her come visit me here from time to time. We reach the second patio and I whisper to her: "Now you're going to meet the whole family."

My mother comes out of the kitchen drying her hands, my uncle gets up with his book under his arm, my grandfather comes out of his room leaning on his cane. We all approach the cage. Aunt Nélida snatches the paper bag from Pepita—who is startled and looks at her without understanding.

"Here is your Sunday bird, my greedy little fellow!" Skillfully, Aunt Nélida opens the door of the cage and at the same instant opens the paper bag. The linnet hops inside the cage. He's so awfully ugly! After flying about wildly, he falls into a trembling fit like the other ones. The owl looks at him. He puffs out his white breast and

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fans out his striped tail. He's so comical. I turn to Pepita and see a person I don't know. What's wrong with her? She staggers backward crazily, she almost knocks my grandmother down. Now she is running headlong. "Pepita! Pepita!" I try to go after her, but they stop me.

She has run out, shouting something horrible. Good heavens, the first day she sets foot in the house and we were letting her see everything, even the beautiful owl at his most interesting moment. "Just what we told you, right? Now it's happened. The coal vendor's daughter has shown her true colors."

Now everyone is returning to what he was doing before. I can't help feeling embarrassed. Because of Pepita they've missed Sunday's best entertainment.

—translated by Donald A. Yates.

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a *NEW* Neil Hockaday story by

THOMAS ADCOCK

One of the two Dublin policemen handed Hock his mostly emptied wallet, which fortunately still contained his passport.

The other cop said to him, "Wherever you are in the world, you should learn there are people everywhere ready and willing to steal your shoes while you're dancing . . ."

THE SCHOOL OF TEN BELLS

by THOMAS ADCOCK

In the city where I live and work, I've been assaulted many times (fists, bottles, assorted blunt objects), spat on, stoned, and shot (bullets in all cases except for the time I chased through Central Park in unsuccessful pursuit of a perpetrator with a bow and a quiver of arrows). Such things come with the territory when you're a Manhattan cop. Technically speaking, I've only once personally been a crime victim in New York.

Outside of New York, there was that embarrassing time over on the other side—on my first trip to Ireland to visit my Uncle Liam in Dun Laoghaire and to poke about some places relevant to family legend down along the coastal villages, then southwesterly over the Wicklow Mountains. The high point of the trip came one morning while I was drinking tea from a thermos in the forward compartment of an omnibus and looked out the window to see a full rainbow, arched from one misty hilltop to another in Wicklow. The low point would come back in Dublin, on my last day before my return flight to the safety of New York City.

I was walking down O'Connell Street toward the River Liffey, for the purpose of a serenely wholesome pilgrimage to Trinity College and the Book of Kells. I had a pricey camera dangling around my

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neck on a braided leather strap and, draped smartly over my shoulders, a brand-new trenchcoat I'd picked up on a three-day shopping jaunt to London (the dollar that year was so strong against European currencies that everybody in the States was making "Burberry runs," as they came to be known). I was also carrying in my breast coat pocket a wallet fat with Bank of Ireland notes, British pounds sterling, a few traveler's checks, and my bedrock fifty bucks American. Oh, I was asking for it, I was.

I paid no particular heed to a half dozen or so young schoolgirls walking toward me in their uniforms of white blouses, pleated wool skirts, kneesocks, and green cardigan sweaters. They were a perfectly common sight at that time of day in Dublin. There was an old, red-faced nun who seemed to be walking along beside the chattering girls, and when she passed me she nodded a top-of-the-day, though I remembered later how it struck me as something more than just that. What happened next occurred well within the pathetically short amount of time it takes the average television commercial to get the average viewer all lathered up about something useless, fattening, and overpriced. All I knew for fifteen or twenty seconds was that a bunch of little girls, maybe eight, nine, or ten years old, had surrounded me right there in the middle of bustling O'Connell Street.

I never felt a thing. But from the corner of my eye, I saw a freckle-faced girl pass something to the old nun, now in back of me—something that looked like my wallet, which then fell to the paving stones like an old potato peel.

My exact words when I finally caught on that I was a prize mark were, "Hey, wait a minute!" Which, suprisingly, is exactly what all the little girls did while the old nun disappeared around a corner. Then I boldly told the little girls who had picked me clean how they had better stay right where we were if they knew what was good for them and I asked a passerby to ring up the Garda—which he did.

A couple of minutes later, when a pair of Dublin cops arrived on the scene of the crime, I saw the passerby half a block down the street pointing me out to a friend and laughing.

"The Sister, I am pained to tell you," one of the two policemen said, "is not likely to be found. The girls here know very well we've no reason to nick them, so they're perfectly well behaved, as you can see."

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The girls looked up at me sweetly. The same policeman waved them off, took a good look at my face, and shook his head.

"You'd be American, would you now?" he asked.

I would, I said sheepishly.

"And would you be Irish-American at that?"

Correct again.

"Ah, and now you've come to see for yourself how Irish eyes are always smiling?" He sounded as if he'd already said those words a few thousand times so far that tourist season. "Yes, and now you've made the discovery of our own Irish gypsies. Tinkers, we call them. Amazing they are, the whole tribe."

He handed me my mostly emptied wallet, which fortunately still contained my passport.

The other cop said to me, "Wherever you are in the world, you should learn there are people everywhere ready and willing to steal your shoes while you're dancing."

Then, purely for the record and in order to leave me with some shred of dignity, they took my name and address in New York and wrote up a robbery report. I'm only glad they never asked my occupation, which I would have been ashamed to admit under the circumstances.

I'm Neil Hockaday and I carry a gold shield for the New York Police Department, where I'm assigned to a special squad known as the S.C.U.M. Patrol, which very fittingly stands for Street Crimes Unit–Manhattan. Mostly I'm just plain Hock to anybody who knows me, and mostly I'm in the streets every day dressed like a plain bum so you wouldn't want to pay me any special attention. In this respect, I operate on the same principle as the phony schoolgirls and the nun back in Dublin, only I'm working what you would call the other side of the desk and my bailiwick is New York, which few visitors have described as a city full of smiling eyes.

So you would think I'm a detective who is sadder but wiser for my experience. You'd think I'd be immunized against what happened to me one Friday last July when I demonstrated all the wit and circumspection of some guy who just rolled into town with a round haircut. But the sorry truth is that even though I'm a cop of better than twenty years and have seen many crummy and conniving things in my life, I'm one of those people who still trust. Maybe you don't think so, but a lot of cops are just like me. We've few illusions any more about being knights on chargers, but we're somehow left

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with a prevailing innocence. Otherwise, we wouldn't be capable of going off every day armed with teacups to empty the ocean.

This I was taught last July, at a place called the School of Ten Bells.

America in the summertime is a quiet land of chilled rooms. Sealed-up cars dash around among temperature-controlled shopping malls, office factories, refrigerated houses, glass-bubbled swimming pools, and domed ballparks with nylon grass. It is the season when New York, the only place in the free world that is not routinely air-conditioned, is even more out of step with the country than usual.

From about the second week of June and stretching well past Labor Day, Manhattan is steaming hot and noisily human. Many windows are still open to admit any passing breeze, and with it the sounds of babies crying, radios playing, brakes squealing, couples fighting. In most neighborhoods, mine included, fans still whirr and flutter the curtains and women lean over pillowed window ledges to monitor passersby. Where there are stoops, there are sitters who emerge in the morning and sometimes sit and kibitz until long after the sun goes down over Jersey and the air grows more soothing with the deepening darkness.

The streets of a New York summer are flowing with people—those of us who live here the year round and another two million tourists besides. Which means that last July I was a very busy cop.

Okay, back up to a little earlier on in the season. I'd agreed to meet one of my regular snitches at a mutually convenient sucker bar near the Port Authority Bus Terminal, the sort of place where nobody either one of us knew did much drinking. Or so I was led to believe.

As these places go, the bar is relatively semihonest and doesn't pretend to be anything but the hiya-sailor dump it plainly is. Some guy walks in and somebody tries to seat him at a stage-side table. If he's in for the second or third time and figures he's now nobody's fool, he makes a big point of walking over to the bar instead. There he sits with a glass of six-dollar swill on the rocks and unwinds before he has to ride home to the wife and tykes.

Across the crowded room, a half dozen wigged and perfumed females largely beyond the age of forty wiggle down a runway to rock-and-roll and then later, on their break, come up behind Mr. Nobody's Fool at the bar with candied breath and baby-doll voices, nuzzling for a drinky. The tab on her bottle of alleged champagne runs twenty

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dollars, which if he doesn't buy her one means she's gone in a flash—house rules, nothing personal—and which if he does means she is then tremendously interested in his life story, for exactly five minutes before she invites him to a quiet booth in back for a larger bottle that runs a cool hundred bucks.

As I sat there and waited and watched the scenery this night, I noticed that one Mr. Nobody's Fool wasn't even falling for the twenty-dollar bottle. He was one tough customer, this one in the three-piece and the wingtips and the college ring.

And then the dog talked. Which is a grift very few New Yorkers, including myself, have witnessed in the past fifty years and many others have never even heard of.

A slow-moving guy with a bad limp, dressed in a pincord jacket and a Hawaiian shirt and dark glasses and holding onto one of those kindly faced Golden Retrievers with a harness for leading around blind folks, walked up to the tough customer at the bar and said, "Do you mind if I sit next to you on this empty stool?"

Something told me the guy with the dog had just dropped a neat hook in his mark, who was helping him get up onto the stool where the B-girl had struck out. Generally speaking, I don't pay much attention to what goes on in dumps like that—I figure everybody there is all grown up and should know where they are and that it's not Kansas—but there are certain things I'm not supposed to ignore as a cop, so I felt professionally obligated to watch over this particular gull.

"Buy you a drink?" asked Nobody's Fool.

"Okay, thank you, young man—I'll get the one for my dog."

"Your dog drinks?"

"Terrible, ain't it? And he's on duty, too. But he's a good old dog just the same and I'm lucky to have him, so I overlook his one little fault."

The bartender poured out a dish of water, spiked it with Duggan's Dew scotch, and put it down in front of the blind man, who thanked the bartender and then asked the gull if he would kindly set it down on the floor for the dog. Which the gull did. And the dog lapped away at the bowl.

Then Nobody's Fool shrugged and looked like he was happy enough to have a good story for around the water cooler the next day. He sat back up on his stool and watched the dog drink and the dancers dance. Then he got curious.

"Mind if I ask something personal?" he said to the blind man.

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"Not at all, son. Ask away."

"Well, I don't mean to be insensitive, but why would you want to come here when you can't see what's going on up there on the stage? I mean, why would anybody come here and pay six bucks for cheap booze if he couldn't see a little peach for the money?"

"Aw, hell's bells, son, I wasn't always blind. I used to come in here regular all the time—I was the goddamn emcee of this here joint. I'm retired now, but I like to drop in once in a while with Rex here. You know, to visit the girls."

And then, sure enough, the B-girls and the dancers who were on break crowded around the blind guy, all cooing and kissy—and pretty soon all the other suckers at the bar moved in close. Two guys I hadn't noticed before moved in, too, close around the suckers—thin little nondescript guys with twitchy fingers.

Then the dog talked.

"I'll have another," Rex said.

The blind guy and all the B-girls looked down at Rex looking up at them. Odd that the blind guy should look down at the wonder dog, I thought.

Then the original Mr. Nobody's Fool looked down at Rex.

"I said I'll have another, please."

Nobody but the suckers in suits seemed especially surprised to hear a dog talking. One of the girls bent over and picked up the bowl from the floor and handed it back to the bartender, who calmly fixed Rex another drink.

"What the hell," said the first gull. And then several of the other suckers said approximately the same thing and crowded close around the talking dog and the blind guy.

"Oh, they're wondering about my dog," the blind guy said to one of the girls. Then to the gulls in general: "Rex here is a talking dog. One of the only talking dogs left in the entire world."

Like maybe once there was a time when the planet was overrun with talkative mutts, I thought. And then I saw how the girls started giving more room to the two thin guys bumping around the edges of the crowd of suckers.

"Hey, you're a ventriloquist," said Nobody's Fool triumphantly.

The blind guy smiled and extended his hand and said, "Well, now, son, I guess I can't fool you. You're a sharp one, that's sure. Waldo's my name, I used to work carnivals all over the country. Now I just do bar tricks, for the hell of it—like throwing my voice so it looks like Rex there's talking. Anyhow, let me buy *you* a drink now, hey?"

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So the gull who was so wise to the champagne swindle was playing out on the talking-dog routine, which is an antique among ruses. Meanwhile, the picks who had gone through the sucker's pockets and the pockets of all the other rubbernecks at the bar were beating it quick to a side exit. Waldo, the phony blind guy, would keep his mark occupied with a drink so that he wouldn't have to notice anything like a wallet missing right away. And the house was taking a cut of all the action, which seemed fairly obvious as I took in the picture.

I might not have done anything if my snitch had been on time, but I checked my watch and noticed he was almost forty-five minutes past due, so I figured I should make the necessary collars to have a bust on an officer's complaint. I grabbed one of the picks, who turned out to be holding the gull's wallet with about a hundred-fifty in cash and the better class of credit cards and snapshots of an overweight wife and kids. I also busted Waldo and the bartender.

Nobody's Fool started telling me about how he knew his rights and didn't really have to get involved, which irritated me. So I said I'd have to keep his wallet for the evidence, which I legally could for twenty-four hours, until the property division had time to officially tag the contents of the object of a robbery. Ordinarily, I'm flexible on this and will return the victim his cash, or most of it, but I tend to go strictly by the book when somebody gives me a hard time of it.

I then called the station house for some uniform backup to take over my bookings since I still had to wait for Buddy-O, the snitch. Who never did show.

I found out about Buddy-O as soon as I walked from the hiya-sailor joint over to my place in the West Forties off Tenth Avenue. It so happens that Buddy-O had a flat over Runyon's Wholesale Pinball, Inc., which is an establishment I see from my window and which as I rounded the corner from Forty-second I noticed was surrounded by squad cars and ambulances.

I shoved my way past the usual mob of gawkers and cleared my way past the uniforms at the doorway of Runyon's. Then, for the first time in our many years of association, I stood in Buddy-O's living room.

This being the world we are obliged to occupy and these being the times they are, it no longer alarms me when somebody dies with a big smile on his face. But poor Buddy-O was not among that happy

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number—from all appearances, his plan to stick around for a while with the rest of us had been rudely interrupted.

A detective I know from the Sex Crimes Squad by the name of Aiello was chalking a line around Buddy-O's sprawled and naked body. In death's repose, Buddy-O looked from the neck up like a freak act I'd seen as a kid in summertimes long ago out at Coney Island. The freak called himself "Popeyed Pete" because he could push his eyeballs most of the way out from their sockets. For ten cents a show, I could watch Popeyed Pete in his corner of the Nature's Human Oddities tent standing with his big arms crossed, bulging out first his left eye and then his right eye and then both eyes together. Then, as a grand finale, both his huge white distended eyeballs would roll around in opposing circles, fully an inch out of his head. Only Buddy-O didn't look that way on purpose. There was piano wire around his neck.

"Here, have yourself a cigar," Aiello said, holding out an opened pack of Te-Amos.

I said thanks and he lit me and I joined every other cop in the little apartment and the police photographer and a couple of morgue guys puffing up grey cloud-cover against the odors. Through an archway to the other room, I saw a sweaty middle-aged guy sitting in a wicker chair. He was the only one who wasn't smoking and the abstinence was making him queasy. He wore a blue-pastel suit, he held a briefcase in his lap, his shirt collar was tight, and his face looked like butter. A couple of Aiello's men were asking him questions and writing down his answers in notebooks, but they didn't seem too excited about what they were doing. Corpses make a place calm.

"Who's the civvy?" I asked Aiello.

"Says he's from the landlord's, says he came up here to try and collect on the rent. Or throw the guy out, one or the other. Says he heard from the super he was coming into some money. Says he found him this way."

I nodded. Had Buddy-O told somebody he trusted he was about to score on a major snitch? The photographer finished up a roll of film, then stepped across the body while reloading his camera to get the other side recorded for forensic posterity. The morgue guys rolled out a green-plastic body bag and unfolded a gurney.

"What's the squad angle in this?" I asked.

"No angle, just a routine look-see. Nowadays the station house gets a call on a naked dead man, they right away call up Sex Crimes

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because it might be fag-bashing." Aiello finished his cigar and walked over to the Pullman kitchen against a wall near the apartment door and doused the butt in a sink full of greasy water with little brown dead things floating on top.

"We don't got a gay blade here, though," he said. "Nothing shows it, anyhow. What he was doing naked, who knows? There was a towel sort of damp hanging in the can where he's got a shower, so maybe that's all there is to that."

And then it occurred to Aiello to ask me, "Say, how come you're here, anyways?"

"I live across the street and saw all the commotion. Besides which, I think I can account for the damp towel. Buddy-O was getting ready for a big night and a payday, which involved meeting me to tell me about something he had for sale. He was a snitch of mine."

"Jesus, Hock, you *live* in this neighborhood?"

"I'm not much of a striver, what can I say?"

I could say maybe that if it hadn't been for a couple of lucky breaks, I might have wound up a low-life con like Buddy-O, since we both grew up in Hell's Kitchen. Not only was Buddy-O a snitch, but he made most of his living as a lush worker—which is what cops call anybody with a razor blade and no heart who cuts open the pockets of sleeping subway riders and winos passed out in doorways.

Also, Buddy-O had recently worked as a ringer salesclerk at an appliance shop on Eighth Avenue. The shop had a sign in the display window that said, WE HIRE THE HANDICAPPED. The handicapped employee was none other than Buddy-O wearing thick-lensed spectacles and a bulky hearing aid he was forever adjusting. A customer would come in and Buddy-O would shuffle up to him with a goofy smile on his face, looking like he was ready to give away the store, which right away would get the customer in a greedy frame of mind. Then Buddy-O would go into his act.

The customer would ask the price of some piece of merchandise. Buddy-O would holler the question upstairs, where the boss was supposed to be, and the boss would holler down some reasonable number. The customer couldn't miss hearing it. Buddy-O would sort of flinch, adjust his hearing aid, and looking confused, quote a price roughly half what the boss had told him. The customer could be relied on not to ask too many questions since he was suddenly in a very big rush to get his order written up, pay off Buddy-O, and get his television set, say, out of the store quick—in such a hurry, in fact, that the TV set he thought was an RCA was actually an RTA

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from someplace in Taiwan if you looked closely. The RTA model would be guaranteed for seventy-two hours against all defects of workmanship, of which there were many—that became evident in roughly seventy-three hours. Even so, few customers came back to return the shoddy stuff. If they did, Buddy-O sent them upstairs to the Customer Satisfaction Department, which was run by a three-hundred-pound Bronx club fighter named Vito who had a talent for convincing unsatisfied customers they were actually quite satisfied after all.

I could have told Aiello all that. And I could have said I'd vastly prefer getting the information I need to do my job from the League of Women Voters than from a wormy lush worker and snitch. But I had the feeling that Aiello figured as much and wasn't interested, anyway. So I simply asked him, "What's your pleasure with this?"

"It's your cheap murder, that's about all. Nothing happened that anybody's going to be complaining about and nobody's gone from this vale who is going to be missed by anybody."

"What about the guy you're sweating in the other room?"

"Him? He don't know nothing but what he found here. He come in for the rent, like he said, and he seen what he seen, and rang up 911 right away."

"How are you going to dispose?"

"Well, since this ain't any business of my squad, I'm going to kick it off to the station house PDU at Midtown North."

"Mind if I have a look around in the other room?"

"Sure, why not?" Aiello said. "Just don't take all night with it—I want to seal up and get home to my dinner."

I went into the other room, which was where Buddy-O slept. One of the Sex Crimes guys told the rent collector he could leave, then had a good laugh up his sleeve by spooking him with a line about how he shouldn't leave town.

The bedroom was immediately depressing to me personally since it was so much like my own. There was a steel-spring bed with a twin-sized mattress on it, a radio on the windowsill with a wire hanger for an antenna, a basin that ran orange water, and a couple of dozen empty beer cans in a plastic bag in the corner ready to take back to the deli. Under the bed were stray socks, dust balls, old matchbooks from the neighborhood saloons and beaneries, and three well thumbed issues of *Big Bazooms* magazine.

On a wooden chair next to the bed, there was something else: a

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pale-blue business card with nothing on it but an illustration of some little silver bells, ten of them.

And that's how the summer started off. Since Buddy-O's murder wasn't likely to be solved with any deliberate speed, I kept the business card I'd found. I put it away in my wallet in the hope it might somehow compute later on, possibly in connection with the bunco duty that was keeping us hopping.

Business was so brisk, in fact, that several of us from the S.C.U.M. Patrol joined with a task force from the Special Frauds Squad in order to break up a pair of the bigger operations. One involved a very slick gang of Midwestern thieves who would spot a jeweler's car parked outside the Diamond Exchange Building in the midtown gem district, icepick a tire, and then follow behind it in their car until the punctured tire eventually went flat and the jeweler had to stop, at which time the gang would score on average a half million dollars for a quick job of work on the side of a highway.

The other big scam was a nice variation on the venerable pigeon-drop, whereby the perpetrator was a raggedy bum who pretended he'd found a high-priced coin collection. The bum would approach some well dressed, wide-eyed tourist and hand over a plastic case full of gleaming foreign coins, a tag inside the case giving a doctor's name and a Park Avenue address and the promise of a reward in the event the collection was lost and returned. The bum would say, "How about helpin' me out? I want to get that reward, but I ain't dressed good enough to get past no Park Avenue doorman. Maybe you could advance me, say, fifty bucks and I give you the coins?"

Overwhelmingly, that summer, tourists were the victims. Which meant I was dressed most of the time as an appropriate decoy.

My ensemble was Budweiser shorts and a matching shirt, brown wingtip shoes and over-the-calf-socks, a straw hat with an "I♡NY" badge pinned to the crown, and a pair of red-white-and-blue-framed sunglasses. What looked like a camera case slung around my neck was actually where I housed my gold shield and my point-to-point radio. I carried my wallet in a back hip pocket so it was nice and tempting for picks. And the shirt was loose enough so I was comfortable wearing my shoulder-holstered .44 Charter Arms Bulldog.

I'd walk a post from the Hudson River end of Forty-second Street, where the Circle Line ferries are docked, across town and through Times Square to Broadway, then back again. If I wanted to and if

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I had the strength, I could have made approximately fifty nickel-beef collars a block, the low-life cons were so thick.

By midseason, I had the bright idea that maybe the huge amount of scamming going on wasn't purely the usual volume. The whole S.C.U.M. Patrol felt the same, I later learned, but we all had full plates every day and precious little time to talk things over in any organized way.

And then one hot Friday afternoon when I wasn't officially on duty, though I was togged out in the Budweiser disguise, I was picked by what is called a "mustard checker," and some answers to a few up-in-the-air questions started getting answered.

I'd had about eight collars that day, I think it was. I lost count by the fifth and was thinking how sooner or later I was going to be recognized by the players I was keeping my eyes on but hadn't busted yet. Anyhow, by the end of my tour it was all I could do to get myself a cold bottle of beer in a deli and cross over Forty-second to some green shade in Bryant Park, where I could sit on a bench for a while and build up some strength for the walk home.

At Sixth Avenue just outside the park wall, I dug out a dollar from my shorts for a frankfurter and stood on a small line at a Sabrett wagon. Ahead of me was a tall guy with a beaky face and a short, round wife in wedgies who was explaining to the Arabic-speaking vendor how she and her husband were from out of town and had had a lot of trouble finding places to eat in New York "where they serve, you know, regular American food." Her husband paid for a batch of all-American hot dogs and two slippery cans of soda and then he turned around with his arms and hands full. His wife picked up a plastic squeeze-bottle of mustard from the wagon and started dressing the franks, then somehow got herself jostled so that she collided with me. My Budweiser shirt went all yellow in globs. I also dropped my beer and the bottle broke on the concrete.

"Oh, mercy lord, lookit what we went and did now, Velma Lu!" the tall guy said. "Gawd-a-mighty, I'm sorry 'bout this, sir."

He got rid of the dogs and the soda on the sidewalk and the vendor lent him a wet rag. He started pawing at me vigorously with the wet towel and damn near hit the butt end of my .44 a couple of times in the process. "It's okay," I said, backing off from him. "Let's just forget it."

I walked away from them toward the park and even worried some about how I'd been short with the out-of-towners I was supposed to be protecting. Then as I sat down, a cold feeling came over me and

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I checked my hip pocket—which turned out to be empty. I jumped up for a look over the park wall at the Sabrett wagon. Sure enough, the guy with the magnolia accent and Velma Lu were gone.

After about five minutes of sitting there, feeling even dumber than I remember feeling that time in Dublin, I spotted Velma Lu waddling toward me with her husband. She even waved at me and hollered, "Yoohoo!" I didn't know what to think, so I figured I'd play along with whatever was about to happen.

The two of them sat down on the bench next to me. The tall guy stuck out his hand and said, "Henry's my name." I shook and told him I was Neil. Then Velma Lu gave me my wallet back and said, "We didn't realize."

"I see," I said, even though I didn't. "No harm done, I guess."

"You got a real nice getup," Velma said. "A little too obvious, though, if you don't mind a little constructive criticism."

"Now, Velma Lu," said Henry, "them shorts and all was plenty good enough to tempt us, wasn't they?"

Velma's vanity was slightly ruffled. She turned to her husband and said, "Well, I wised up soon as we ducked down into the subway and I seen how the wallet I picked had only a lousy seven bucks inside and not even so much as a driver's license to tell us his name."

"But, Velma Lu," Henry said, "we knew right away he was our kind of people 'cause of the card. Whyn't you give it back to him since you already give back his wallet?"

Velma smiled at me sweetly and handed me the card I'd found in Buddy-O's bedroom, the one with the ten bells on it. "Like I say, we didn't realize how you was a fellow student."

"That's okay," I said.

"You goin' tonight?" Henry asked me.

"Why, sure," I said. "I was just thinking of lazing around the park for a while and having a little something to eat first. How about you folks?"

"Same here," Henry said. "And then we saw you and we couldn't resist."

Velma giggled.

"How about we all go together?" I suggested, since I hadn't the slightest idea where it was we classmates were going.

"Now you're talking, neighbor," Henry said. "Let's head on downtown. We got about an hour to kill before school. Tonight's a big night for Velma Lu, in case you didn't know . . ."

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Dinner was whoppers and fries at a Burger King in the West Thirties popular with night-shift clerks at the nearby Morgan Station post office and pro-wrestling fans who come for the Felt Forum bouts in their vans full of greasy-faced kids. Velma showed me snapshots of all her grandchildren and Henry made me swear I'd drop by the house if I ever found myself in Dubberly, Louisiana. I was a very good listener and only left the table once, to use the men's room. Which was a lie—actually, I made a telephone call to the Midtown South precinct house and requested an Anti-Crime Squad tail.

"School" was a second-floor loft at the corner of Twenty-ninth Street and Eighth Avenue. There were silhouette paintings of pajama-clad jujitsu fighters on the windows over the street, but martial arts were not part of the curriculum.

I followed Henry and Velma up a long narrow stairway, and followed their lead when we reached the top and had to deal with a gorilla in a T-shirt and black-leather jacket who wanted to see that everybody owned a pale-blue business card with bells on it. When I showed him mine, he gave me an unfriendly look and snarled, "How come I ain't ever seen *you* before?"

Henry and Velma gave me a couple of ill-disposed glances, too, like maybe they were reconsidering their invitation to sit around on the veranda with a tray of mint juleps down in Dubberly some fine day. It was a very chancy moment, the kind where you have to remember to breathe deeply and not let your voice get away from you.

The way it was playing, I had two options. I could run down the stairs and meet up with the three plainclothes tails I noticed when they fell in behind us as we left the Burger King—which would be an excellent way of attracting some bullets to my back. Or I could go with the theory I'd pretty much worked out about what was going on.

I decided that there was no percentage in being shy or defensive. "You did your job, Muscles," I said. "You see I have the card. Now back off and I'll let it go that you're embarrassing me in front of my friends. Or should I get the boss out here to set you straight?"

The gorilla looked at my card again. "Aw, g'wan inside," he muttered.

I rested a hand on his shoulder on my way past and, mainly for the benefit of Henry and Velma, I told him, "Watch your step with me from now on, Bonzo. What you don't know might be dangerous."

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What I noticed he packed around his neck confirmed the most recently developed part of my theory about what I'd stumbled on.

Inside the loft, there must have been a hundred cons sitting around on folding steel chairs, or about to get themselves settled like Henry and Velma and me. We took seats near the back, for which I was grateful since I'd spotted several grifters in the crowd who I'd collared at one time or another over the years. And up in front of the crowd, nearly ready to begin the night's lesson, was none other than Waldo of the talking-dog routine. He must have put out bail.

Henry poked me in the ribs and said, "Velma Lu's going for her graduation tonight." And then Waldo up in front raised his hands as the signal for everybody to quiet down for business.

He stood next to a dressmaker's dummy done up like a man in a business suit and raincoat. "Welcome, friends," he said. There was a scattering of applause. "Thank you, and welcome to the School of Ten Bells. Tonight, you know, is special. And I see no reason to delay the proceedings. You all know our friend Velma Lu from Louisiana? Velma, stand up, darling, wherever you are."

Velma stood up and Henry beamed at her. I slunk down in my chair a little.

"Come on up, Velma!" Waldo boomed.

Velma stepped around Henry and me and walked toward the front of the room. Waldo led the applause, and when she reached him he hugged her. Then she moved over to stand next to the dummy as Waldo continued to address the class.

"Velma here—well, she's made me proud as punch to be a teacher," Waldo said. "Part of being a good teacher of this artful dodge in which we're engaged is knowing when you should retire and make room for new talent. And as you know, I was forced to retire myself just a few weeks ago when I had the unfortunate experience of being arrested."

I tried not to move.

"So Velma's accomplishments are especially important to me tonight. And she's important to all of you, too. Velma is a prize example of how crime pays."

There was applause.

"She has paid careful attention to all the lessons we've provided here during the long winter months in preparation for this highly profitable season, gaining more and more confidence out in the field. And, well, now—Velma, have you anything to say before we begin your graduation?"

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Velma took a step forward and said, "Only to repeat what we've said before—that we're so thankful that you started up the school."

More applause.

"All right now, Velma," Waldo said in his game-show voice. "If you please!"

There was more applause as Velma rubbed her hands and turned back toward the dummy. Then complete silence.

Velma's fingers flew through the folds of raincoat and blazer and trousers. Henry seemed nervous that it was taking her so long to get to the wallet.

But finally she did and she held it up over her head and Waldo shouted the praise she'd worked so long and hard to hear: "Ten bells in the dummy and the little lady didn't ring a one!"

Then thunderous applause, and the hundred cons were on their feet and moving around. I took the opportunity to slide out to the stairway.

This time the gorilla was solicitous.

"I'm going down for cigarettes, Bonzo," I lied. "You want me to bring you something back so we can be friends?"

"Wouldn't mind a Heath bar."

"You got it, pal."

When I made it down to the street, I stepped off to the side of the doorway into the nearest pool of light. Taking my shield out of the camera case I still wore around my neck, I held it overhead so the Anti-Crime tails could come out of their shadows and meet me.

"What's going down is a school for picks," I told them. "Up there are about a hundred perps in assembly for unlawful purpose. Non-violent types. Maybe you want to get five or six wagons out in the street and lob a few tear-gas canisters up through the windows. There's only the one way down and then the uniforms can pull them out all in a nice neat row. But first there's a guy on the door at the top of the stairway I'm going to have to bring down alone. When I've got him in bracelets down here, we'll be in business for the rest."

One of the Anti-Crime officers summoned a squad car on his PTP radio. The two others took places on either side of the doorway and I went back up to speak to Bonzo.

When I got to the top stair, I handed him my shield like it was the candy he expected.

"Huh?" he said.

"Bonzo, my friend, you have the right to remain silent, you have

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the right—" And as I read him, I pulled out my .44, which is a very big and frightening piece. This I held inches from his chest in my right hand while I removed the length of piano wire I'd felt looped around his neck under his leather jacket. "—I'm going to book you for the murder of a fellow called Buddy-O."

"Who told you I done that guy?" Bonzo said.

"Your boss in there, Waldo," I lied. In a court of law, I always tell the truth like I swear on the Bible I'm going to do. But once I read somebody his rights and he wants to talk to me anyhow, I sometimes figure it's all fair in love, war, and cops-and-robbers. "You think the boss is going to keep quiet for you when I tell him I got the goods? Hell, Bonzo, he'll let you step off for this one and he won't do a day's worth of stir himself. That's the way it is with bosses."

"The son-of-a-bitch!" Bonzo's brow dropped ever lower. "And the fink is all the time callin' everybody his *friend!* Hell, *he* was the one who told me to croak that guy—"

"Buddy-O."

"Yeah, Buddy-O. Waldo told me to croak him 'cause he was threatenin' to blow off to some cop if he didn't get a cut out of this pick school here. This guy, either he's dumb or he has guts that don't quit, 'cause he gives Waldo a deadline on the shakedown and he even tells Waldo when and where he's goin' to meet his Uncle Murphy."

"So you went and did Buddy-O with the piano wire and Waldo went to the place where Buddy-O was supposed to meet the cop?"

"That's it. See, Waldo wants an alibi. So he goes to that bar and makes himself so conspicuous he gets busted—which is about as conspicuous as you can get."

And then Bonzo looked as if he might be sinking into some deep thought. "Say," he said, "*you* was the Uncle Murphy in all this, wasn't you? Ain't I got a right to see a lawyer, like you said? I ain't saying no more to you!"

I walked him downstairs, cuffing his wrists behind him on the way. As soon as the three or four dozen cops I saw surrounding the building could see I was in the clear, I heard the dull, popping sound of a tear-gas gun and the shattering glass, then coughing and shouting and running.

I had a couple of uniforms haul Bonzo off for booking on first-degree murder, then the cons started stumbling and wheezing and clattering down the stairs to meet a phalanx of drawn revolvers. When Waldo himself emerged, I pulled him aside for a private word.

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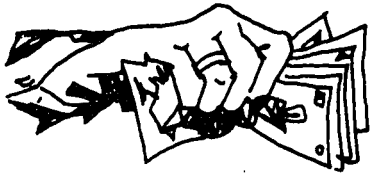
"Remember me?" I asked him. He wiped his eyes with a handkerchief he'd wet down with saliva, coughed several times, and recognized me from the hiya-sailor joint where we'd last met. "Goddamn sneaking bastard cop," he said.

"Those are ugly sentiments, Waldo. But you're not going to spoil the fact that tonight I feel something like a redeemed man."

"How come?"

"I feel like I just stole your shoes, Waldo—while you were dancing."



DETECTIVERSE

WHAT'S A FRIEND FOR?

by ANDREW J. BURTON

When all the world's against you
And your troubles run too deep,
Remember that a coil of rope
Can bring eternal sleep.
Or if a sad and hopeless life
Has put you to the test,
A quick flick of the razor
Can set your cares at rest.
However plagued your aching heart,
How full your cup of woe,
A drop of poison sends your soul
Where sorrows never go.
But if it is a lack of friends
That drives your wish to die,
Remember all my kind advice—
Don't say I didn't try.

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

"He's quite a handy lad," the probation officer told Bessie. "The house could do with a bit of maintenance and a lick of paint," he added, looking around in his casually insulting way.

"I've done what I could," said Bessie defensively. Then she admitted: "It has *been let go a bit."*

"It could be made very nice. We'd share the cost of the materials, and of course the labor would be free. It would work out very well for you."

Bessie sat looking at her hands. "I suppose it'd be what you might call a good deed."

Another winner from Robert Barnard, whose "Breakfast Television" was nominated for an Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America earlier this year and whose "The Woman in the Wardrobe" won your overwhelming vote for the 1987 EQMM Readers Award . . .

A GOOD DEED

by ROBERT BARNARD

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Bessie Hargreaves, shaking her head. It was a white head, but the gentle curls suggested she was a woman who would never willingly let herself go. "I've never heard of such a thing."

"Oh, it's a very well established scheme," said young Mr. Bateson from the Probation Office brightly. He meant to reassure her, but he only filled her with the realization that she was very out of touch with contemporary life. "It's part of the process of rehabilitation. They're only minor offenders, and they're put to work at local use-

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fulness instead of sending them to jail. You see, what they learn in jail can often turn them into criminals for life, whereas with this scheme they're doing something constructive—it's almost like learning a trade."

"I suppose that's true," admitted Mrs. Hargreaves.

"This lad I was thinking of sending along to help you with the redecoration: he's just a young football hooligan—"

"I wouldn't want anyone violent," Bessie Hargreaves said quickly.

"Oh, he's nothing worse than destructive. With all this youth unemployment around, it's sometimes the only way they can express themselves. It's their way of getting through to society—you can almost see it as *constructive,* in a sense. And he's quite a handy lad. The house could do with a bit of maintenance and a lick of paint," he added, looking around in his casually insulting way, "as I'm sure you'd agree."

"I've done what I could," said Bessie defensively. Then she admitted: "It *has* been let go a bit."

"It could be made very nice."

"We'd only been married five years when my husband died, you see. It's been a struggle to keep it on, even though it's only a terrace house. I could never afford to have the work done."

"We'd share the cost of the materials," said the young man, "and of course the labor would be free. It would work out very well for you."

Bessie sat looking at her hands, shaking her head almost imperceptibly. Finally she said: "I suppose it'd be what you might call a good deed."

"It would. It would indeed."

Bessie took a deep breath. "All right. You can send him along."

Bessie quite enjoyed going round to the Do It Yourself center that was ten minutes away, and choosing paint and a bit of wallpaper for her own bedroom. She kept telling herself it was as long as she could remember since anything had been done to the house, but all the time there was, niggling at the back of her mind, this worry about the young man that was coming. What would he be like? And she told herself it was the situation that worried her—something new, something almost, it seemed, threatening. Already she found that in her mind she was calling him "the thug." She would be glad when it was over.

She was sweeping the kitchen floor on Wednesday morning when

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he arrived, not more than ten minutes after the appointed time. He was a strong, thick-set young man of perhaps twenty—uncouth, yet perhaps not ill-intentioned. He walked in his heavy shoes over her newly swept floor, but then said "Sorry" and took them off in the hall. She swept up the little scraps of mud, then went into the hall, almost shyly.

"Where do we start, then?" asked the young man.

"I thought in the living room," said Bessie. "It's where I mostly am, and it *would* be brighter for a coat of paint."

"Right you are," said the boy, and followed her into the room, where she had already laid a covering of newspapers over the floor. He looked around. "No problem here, not if we just tidy up the wallpaper and paint over it."

"I thought that's what we should do," said Bessie, nodding, "seeing as you've just got the week. You see, I didn't know about wallpapering, but I did buy a bit of bright, flowery paper for my bedroom. It was such a cheerful pattern—"

"I can try," said the boy. "I helped me mam with a bit of papering just before she took off. It won't be professional, but I'll do the best I can."

"That will be nice. Would you like a cup of tea—er, I'm not sure I caught your name."

"Brian. Me mates call me Bri."

Mrs. Hargreaves didn't feel quite up to Bri, so she said, "Do you take sugar, Brian?"

While they had their tea, they got almost friendly, with Brian coming down off his ladder, where he'd been preparing the ceiling, and sipping his sweet, hot brew over by the fireplace.

"Did your mother leave you, did you say?" asked Bessie, with a shocked expression on her face.

"That's right. Took off wi' a fancy man. Never seen her in me life sin'."

"What happened to you then?"

"They put me in an institution. It weren't that bad. Then me auntie took me on."

"Do you still live with her?"

"Yeah. We get on all right. She gets a bit pissed off, what wi' me being around all day, but there's nowt to be done about that. We don't fight that much."

Mrs. Hargreaves was going to say more, perhaps about how grateful he must be to his aunt, but then—was it fancy, or was he really

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eyeing her lovely silver frame, the one she'd picked up in that junk shop all those years ago for half a crown, with that picture of her and Walter in Scarborough in it? No, probably it was her imagination. On the other hand, what did he mean when he said he and his aunt didn't *fight* that much? The boy—young man, really—drank down his tea and bounded up the ladder again, and as he stood there, so high, so masterfully above her, she couldn't help noticing how broad his shoulders were, and how thick his arms, and when she felt that impression of youth and power a sharp dagger of fear stabbed her. She wouldn't have a chance.

Still, they got on all right that day. Brian's interest in that silver frame seemed perfectly natural when, later on, darting down from his ladder to refill his paint tray with matte white for the ceiling, he said casually: "That you and your old man?"

"That's right. When we were young." Bessie added sadly, "He was never anything else. We only had the five years."

The boy seemed touched. Anyway, he didn't ask any more questions, but hopped up his ladder and got on with his job. When he had to go out to the cart of tools and equipment he'd left by the gate, he always put on and took off his shoes by the back door.

"I can see you like to keep the place tidy," he said.

"Well, I *do,*" Bessie agreed. "I've always liked to keep things spick and span, even though I've not had much to keep clean. But you can't expect not to get a bit of dirt in when you're decorating."

The living room took a good two days' work, and when it was finished Bessie decided the boy had done a good, if rough, job of work. There were places one shouldn't look at too closely, but the general effect was greatly improved. It was bright, almost cheerful.

The boy himself—well, he didn't improve on acquaintance. And yet, it wasn't quite that. It was just that, as he felt more at home in the house and with her, he got more relaxed, and more—more familiar, more unbuttoned, more what she took to be his real brash self. Was it only brashness—what Bessie called to herself "lippy"—or was it something more? Something almost—brutal?

On the second evening, when Bessie was pottering around cleaning up newspapers from the floor, Brian went over without so much as a by-your-leave and picked up the other snapshot in the room, from the window ledge where it was kept.

"Saw this when I was painting," he said. "Is this your son?"

The face in the photograph was a young man in open-necked shirt

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and flannels, not good-looking but cheerful and sunny-faced, taken in the little scrap of garden in the front.

"Oh, no," Bessie said, her face screwed into a troubled expression. "We never had no children, Walter and me. We *would* have had, but we never knew there'd be no time. Walter was killed in a pit accident, you see."

"Who's this, then?"

"That was Tom Taylor. He lodged here for a bit. He was an apprentice at Sawley's—you know, the cotton mill."

"Looks a jolly chap."

"Oh, he was. Always cheery."

"Do you keep in touch?"

"Oh, no, no. It wasn't to be expected."

"You ought to have. You need some young chap like that to look after you."

He'd like to move in, Bessie said to herself. He'd like to move in here with me and live off me. I bet his aunt takes most of his dole money and he thinks I'd be a softer touch.

"Oh, I can take care of myself, never you mind," she said. "I've had to."

Before he embarked on the bedroom, he painted all the doors in the house a glossy white. He wanted time to think about the papering, remember how it should be done. The weather had turned hot and he wore just a T-shirt and jeans under his overalls. There was nothing personal of Mrs. Hargreaves' in the hall or the landing, so when they had tea or coffee, or when he ate the "snap" that he brought with him for his lunch, he started talking about himself. If he did want Bessie to take him in, he certainly chose the wrong subjects.

"Got in a fight down at t'pub last night," he would say. "Supped too much black 'n' tan. So had t'other bugger, come to that. Must've bin barmy, me still being on probation. Still, landlord didn't call the police. He just showed us the door, so there was no harm done."

"What were you quarreling about?" Bessie asked, envisaging a girl, or politics, or some bet or other.

"Can't rightly remember," said Brian, scratching his head and grinning ruefully.

Her fear suddenly shot into her mind a picture of this boy, this young thug, breaking her as a child breaks a cheap toy—no, as the cook in the cafe she had once worked in had quartered a chicken,

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the brittle bones snapping under his capable knife. She nearly panicked, but she controlled herself enough to collect up the cups.

"I don't approve of all this violence," she said.

"Not likely you would," said Brian equably. "I think it were a bit daft meself." But his life of dole and emptiness didn't have many highlights, and getting into "a bit of a scrap" was among those few, so that, when he talked to her, it was quite often of that, or scrapes he'd been in at school or the orphanage, or riots at the local football ground at the end of matches.

"I got in there and I put me boot into one of the Everton supporters," he would say, "then I smashed me fist into the face of another, and I got a third before the police picked me up. It was great!"

Sometimes after these conversations Bessie Hargreaves felt quite sick. It was the sickness of fear.

After the weekend, Brian would get down to the bedroom. Before he came on Monday, Bessie removed her little tin box of jewelry from the bedroom and hid it in the kitchen cabinet. There was nothing of any great value in it, but most of it had been given her by Walter, and there was the little Christmas brooch from her lodger Tom Taylor that she set an oddly high price on. And apart from the pieces with sentimental value, there was the amethyst bracelet that had been Walter's mother's that she was always meaning to take and have valued. So she took the box and hid it away from the young thug's prying gaze.

Brian, when he came, was not interested in any personal mementoes in the bedroom—he was more taken up by the techniques of wallpapering. Some things he remembered, some he had talked over with his mates during the weekend. He mostly knew what to do, and the problems, when they came up, he solved by an innate practicality. During the morning he discussed them with Bessie as they arose and this kept him off dangerous subjects. After lunch, as he prepared for the afternoon's work, he talked with the amused condescension of the young about his auntie, and from her he got onto the subject of his mother.

"It's my belief—thinking it over, like—that she took off because she knew she wouldn't be able to cope wi' me much longer. I were twelve, but I were big. She'd managed up to then, but she knew she couldn't much longer."

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"You must have been a right handful if your own mother couldn't manage you," said Bessie timorously.

"Aye, I were. Mind you, she'd a quick hand, and she could really sting if she got one in when I weren't looking. But you get used to that, don't you? I bet her fancy man gave her a worse time than I ever would've—serve the old duck right."

"You shouldn't speak of your mother like that," said Bessie.

"What did she ever do for me?" Brian asked reasonably.

Bessie was appalled by the new view Brian gave her of family relationships—loveless, antagonistic, cruel. It would never have been like that if she had had a child. What could you expect of a boy who had grown up in that sort of atmosphere? She looked at Brian standing there, a spatula in his powerful right hand, and she looked down in fear, excused herself, and went downstairs.

He really got on fast that day, and since he would finish on the Tuesday Bessie thought she ought to make some gesture of appreciation. Just before the shops shut, she pottered down to the butcher's and got some pork. She'd make one of her pork pies—she hadn't made one in years, not since Tom Taylor was lodging with her. She baked it that evening. The pastry was difficult, because the let-down flap on her kitchen cabinet, on which she kneaded and rolled it, had become very rickety. But even so, when she took it out of the oven it looked a picture, and smelt a dream.

Her bedroom, next day, looked a picture, too. Brian had only one wall to do, a long, flat, uncomplicated wall. Bessie had bought a pretty strip of border to put round the room under the picture rail. When everything was done, they stood surveying it together—it was light, flowery, really pretty.

"I reckon I could do this for a living," said Brian.

"I reckon you could," said Bessie. "You've done a right good job. I've baked something for you."

"Baked something?"

"Yes—well, for us. A little thank-you. I thought you deserved one after all the work you've put in. My pork pies used to be famous."

"I like a nice bit o' pork pie," said Brian.

They sat on the bed to eat it, and looked around the room commenting admiringly on what a difference the new wallpaper made. Brian said he had never tasted pork pie like it—it really knocked the shop jobs into a cocked hat, didn't it?

"It *is* very nice," said Bessie, trying not to boast. She'd have felt

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pretty insulted if he hadn't thought it better than the shop jobs. "It's not quite my best. I haven't made hot-water pastry in years, and the flap on my kitchen cabinet is so rocky I couldn't really go at the kneading properly."

"I've got the afternoon," said Brian. "I'll see if I can fix it for you."

"Oh, there's no call," said Mrs. Hargreaves, becoming agitated but trying to hide it. "You've done your jobs, like I agreed with the probation man. And I make so little pastry these days, being on my own."

"No trouble," said Brian, getting up. "I'll get it fixed and then have me other bit o' pie when I'm done. I've got a saw and chisel in me barrow."

"No, no, really!" Bessie called weakly, but he was down and out to his barrow before she could follow him more slowly down the stairs. By the time she reached the kitchen, he was back inside, taking down the flap of the cabinet. Bessie stood in the doorway, transfixed by the sight of her little box of trinkets sitting on the shelf above the flour and the rice and the cake-mixes.

Brian didn't notice it at all. He had set a big, threatening saw and a long chisel on the kitchen table and he was pulling the flap up and down.

"Aye, it's rocky," he said. "I think it must be the supports underneath."

Bessie watched, horrified, as her little box jumped up and down on the shelf, and as if in a dream she moved round the kitchen, skirting those terrifying tools on the table, and stood against the draining board, on which the breadknife still lay among her breakfast washing-up. Brian picked up the big saw and looked at it.

"I'll not need that," he said. "There's nowt wrong wi' the flap. But I'll get at the supports wi' this." He picked up the chisel, and stood there considering, stroking it with his hand. At the sight of the big lad with the threatening tool in his hand, Bessie's hand had gone behind her and clutched comfortingly to the breadknife.

"I'll just take a bit off one o' them supports," said Brian, still caressing the chisel. Then he took up the flap again and banged it down to establish the provenance of its ricketiness. The box jumped up and down on the shelf and finally rolled down over the bags of flour and emptied, in pathetic profusion, onto the flap its contents of trinkets and jewelry.

"Well—that's a funny thing to keep in your kitchen cupboard," said Brian, smiling down from his young height at the display—and

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not seeing as Bessie darted forward and plunged the knife cleanly into his stomach, over and over, fearfully, fatally, until he rolled over onto the floor, his face creased into an expression of pain and inquiry.

"It was something we never thought about," said young Mr. Bateson at the Probation Office, shaking his head. "I mean, you check out the offenders, but you don't think to check out on the old people they're supposed to help."

"Incipient paranoia," said his superior, looking up from the report. "She was released from the institution as cured two or three years ago. Still, she had killed the lodger. Got the idea he was going to rape or murder her and struck him with a knife, just the same way."

"Whoever would have thought?" said Bateson, shaking his head. "To me she was just like any other old lady." He was quiet for a moment. But being a congenitally optimistic young man, he shook off his pensiveness and added with a smile: "Still, there's one good thing, isn't there? The fact that it was that way round means there's no danger to the rehabilitation program."

DETECTIVERSE

HEAVY DATE

by JOHN E. SHIELDS

Said Lee to her escort, Vin,
"I'd rather die than give in!"
He said, "Since you insist,
It's too hard to resist,"
Now they're notifying her next-of-kin.

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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

The car was an engineering work of art. The body was seamless, shaped not for velocity but for balance, with interchangeable balloon and radial wheels on the same axles, which had double suspension systems to lock in place for either. The steering was flexible from left-hand drive to right, the power train flexible from front to rear, side to side, corner to corner, even to individual wheels. Everywhere Sheffield looked, he saw imagination, innovation, improvement. The car was built for reliability and stability, power and pace. Sheffield couldn't have been more impressed.

Speaking of impressed, Clark Howard's most recent novel, Quicksilver, *was called by* Publishers Weekly *"intense, deeply haunting, and spellbinding." He himself was called by* PW *"a superlative storyteller." Tell us about it . . .*

THE DAKAR RUN

by CLARK HOWARD

Jack Sheffield limped out of the little Theatre Americain with John Garfield's defiant words still fresh in his mind. "What are you gonna do, kill me?" Garfield, as Charley Davis, the boxer, had asked Lloyd Gough, the crooked promoter, at the end of *Body and Soul*. Then, challengingly, smugly, with the Garfield arrogance, "Everybody dies!" And he had walked away, with Lilli Palmer on his arm.

Pausing outside to look at the *Body and Soul* poster next to the boxoffice, Sheffield sighed wistfully. They were gone now, Garfield and Lilli Palmer, black-and-white films, the good numbers like Hazel Brooks singing "Am I Blue?" Even boxing—*real* boxing— was

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down the tubes. In the old days, hungry kids challenged seasoned pros. Now millionaires fought gold-medal winners.

Shaking his head at the pity of things changed, Sheffield turned up his collar against the chilly Paris night and limped up La Villette to the Place de Cluny. There was a cafe there called the Nubian, owned by a very tall Sudanese who mixed his own mustard, so hot it could etch cement. Every Tuesday night, the old-movie feature at the Theatre Americain changed and Jack Sheffield went to see it, whatever it was, and afterward he always walked to the Nubian for sausage and mustard and a double gin. Later, warm from the gin and the food, he would stroll, rain or fair, summer or winter, along the Rue de Rivoli next to the Tuileries, down to the Crazy Horse Saloon to wait for the chorus to do its last high kick so that Jane, the long-legged Englishwoman with whom he lived, could change and go home. Tuesdays never varied for Sheffield.

How many Tuesdays, he wondered as he entered the Nubian, had he been doing this exact same thing? As he pulled out a chair at the rickety little table for two at which he always sat, he tried to recall how long he had been with Jane. Was it three years or four? Catching the eye of the Sudanese, Sheffield raised his hand to signal that he was here, which was all he had to do; he never varied his order. The Sudanese nodded and walked with a camel-like gait toward the kitchen, and Sheffield was about to resume mentally backtracking his life when a young girl came in and walked directly to his table.

"Hi," she said.

He looked at her, tilting his head an inch, squinting slightly without his glasses. When he didn't respond at once, the girl gave him a wry, not totally amused look.

"I'm Chelsea," she said pointedly. "Chelsea Sheffield. Your daughter." She pulled out the opposite chair. "Don't bother to get up."

Sheffield stared at her incredulously, lips parted but no words being generated by his surprised brain.

"Mother," she explained, "said all I had to do to find you in Paris was locate a theater that showed old American movies, wait until the bill changed, and stand outside after the first show. She said if you didn't walk out, you were either dead or had been banished from France."

"Your mother was always right," he said, adding drily, "about everything."

"She also said you might be limping, after smashing up your ankle at Le Mans two years ago. Is the limp permanent?"

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"More or less." He quickly changed the subject. "Your mother's well, I presume."

"Very. Like a Main Line Philadelphia doctor's wife should be. Her picture was on the society page five times last year."

"And your sister?"

"Perfect," Chelsea replied, "just as she's always been. Married to a proper young stockbroker, mother of two proper little girls, residing in a proper two-story Colonial, driving a proper Chrysler station wagon. Julie has *always* been proper. I was the foul-mouthed little girl who was too much like my race-car-driver daddy, remember?"

Sheffield didn't know whether to smile or frown. "What are you doing in Paris?" he asked.

"I came over with my boy friend. We're going to enter the Paris-to-Dakar race."

Now it was Sheffield who made a wry face. "Are you serious?"

"You better believe it," Chelsea assured him.

"Who's your boy friend—Parnelli Jones?"

"Funny, Father. His name is Austin Trowbridge. He's the son of Max Trowbridge."

Sheffield's eyebrows rose. Max Trowbridge had been one of the best race-car designers in the world before his untimely death in a plane crash. "Did your boy friend learn anything from his father?" he asked Chelsea.

"He learned plenty. For two years he's been building a car for the Paris-Dakar Rally. It's finished now. You'd have to see it to believe it: part Land Rover, part Rolls-Royce, part Corvette. We've been test-driving it on the beach at Hilton Head. It'll do one hundred and ten on hard-packed sand, ninety on soft. The engine will cut sixty-six hundred R.P.M.s."

"Where'd you learn about R.P.M.s?" he asked, surprised.

Chelsea shrugged. "I started hanging out at dirt-bike tracks when I was fourteen. Gave mother fits. When I moved up to stock cars, she sent me away to boarding school. It didn't work. One summer at Daytona, I met Austin. We were both kind of lonely. His father had just been killed and mine—" she glanced away "—well, let's just say that Mother's new husband didn't quite know how to cope with Jack Sheffield's youngest."

And I wasn't around, Sheffield thought. He'd been off at Formula One tracks in Belgium and Italy and England, drinking champagne from racing helmets and Ferragamos with four-inch heels; looking

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for faster cars, getting older with younger women, sometimes crashing. Burning, bleeding, breaking—

"Don't get me wrong," Chelsea said, "I'm not being critical. Everybody's got to live his life the way he thinks best. I'm going my own way with Austin, so I can't fault you for going your own way without me."

But you do, Sheffield thought. He studied his daughter. She had to be nineteen now, maybe twenty—he couldn't even remember when her birthday was. She was plainer than she was pretty—her sister Julie had their mother's good looks, poor Chelsea favored him. Lifeless brown hair, imperfect complexion, a nose that didn't quite fit—yet there was something about her that he suspected could seize and hold a man, if he was the right man. Under the leather jacket she had unzipped was clearly the body of a woman, just as her direct grey eyes were obviously no longer the eyes of a child. There was no way, Sheffield knew, he could ever make up for the years he hadn't been there, but maybe he could do something to lessen the bad taste he'd left. Like talking her out of entering the Paris-Dakar Rally.

"You know, even with the best car in the world the Paris-Dakar run is the worst racing experience imaginable. Eight thousand miles across the Sahara Desert over the roughest terrain on the face of the earth, driving under the most brutal, dangerous, dreadful conditions. It shouldn't be called a rally, it's more like an endurance test. It's three weeks of hell."

"*You've* done it," she pointed out. "Twice."

"We already know I make mistakes. I didn't win either time, you know."

A touch of fierceness settled in her eyes. "I didn't look you up to get advice on whether to enter—Austin and I have already decided that. I came to ask if you'd go over the route map with us, maybe give us some pointers. But if you're too busy—"

"I'm not too busy," he said. Her words cut him easily.

Chelsea wrote down an address in Montmartre. "It's a rented garage. We've got two rooms above it. The car arrived in Marseilles by freighter this morning. Austin's driving it up tomorrow." She stood and zipped up her jacket. "When can we expect you?"

"Day after tomorrow okay?"

"Swell. See you then." She nodded briefly. "Good night, Father."

"Good night."

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As she was walking out, Sheffield realized that he hadn't once spoken her name.

On Thursday, Sheffield took Jane with him to Montmartre, thinking at least he would have somebody on his side if Chelsea and Austin Trowbridge started making him feel guilty. It didn't work. Jane and Chelsea, who were only ten years apart in age, took to each other at once.

"Darling, you look just like him," Jane analyzed. "Same eyes, same chin. But I'm sure your disposition is much better. Jack has absolutely no sense of humor sometimes. If he wasn't so marvelous in bed, I'd leave him."

"He'll probably save you the trouble someday," Chelsea replied. "Father leaves everyone eventually."

"Why don't you two just talk about me like I'm not here?" Sheffield asked irritably.

Austin Trowbridge rescued him. "Like to take a look at the car, Mr. Sheffield?"

"Call me Jack. Yes, I would. I was a great admirer of your father, Austin. He was the best."

"Thanks. I hope I'll be half as good someday."

As soon as Sheffield saw the car, he knew Austin was already half as good, and more. It was an engineering work of art. The body was seamless, shaped not for velocity but for balance, with interchangeable balloon and radial wheels on the same axles, which had double suspension systems to lock in place for either. The steering was flexible from left-hand drive to right, the power train flexible from front to rear, side to side, corner to corner, even to individual wheels. The windshield displaced in one-eighth-inch increments to deflect glare in the daytime, while infrared sealed beams could outline night figures fifty yards distant. A primary petrol tank held one hundred liters of fuel and a backup tank carried two hundred additional liters. Everywhere Sheffield looked—carburetor, generator, distributor, voltage regulator, belt system, radiator, fuel lines—he saw imagination, innovation, improvement. The car was built for reliability and stability, power and pace. Sheffield couldn't have been more impressed.

"It's a beauty, Austin. Your dad would be proud."

"Thanks. I named it after him. I call it the 'Max One.'"

Nice kid, Sheffield thought. He'd probably been very close to his father before the tragedy. Not like Chelsea and himself.

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After looking at the Max One, Sheffield took them all to lunch at a cafe on the Boulevard de la Chapelle. While they ate, he talked about the rally.

"There's no competition like it in the world," he said. "It's open to cars, trucks, motorcycles, anything on wheels. There's never any telling who'll be in—or on—the vehicle next to you: it might be a professional driver, a movie star, a millionaire, an Arab king. The run starts in Paris on New Year's Day, goes across France and Spain to Barcelona, crosses the Mediterranean by boat to Africa, then down the length of Algiers, around in a circle of sorts in Niger, across Mali, across Mauritania, up into the Spanish Sahara, then down along the Atlantic coast into Senegal to Dakar. The drivers spend fifteen to eighteen hours a day in their vehicles, then crawl into a sleeping bag for a short, badly needed rest at the end of each day's stage. From three to four hundred vehicles start the run each year. About one in ten will finish."

"We'll finish," Chelsea assured him. "We might even win."

Sheffield shook his head. "You won't win. No matter how good the car is, you don't have the experience to win."

"We don't have to win," Austin conceded. "We just have to finish well—respectably. There are some investors who financed my father from time to time. They've agreed to set me up in my own automotive-design center if I prove myself by building a vehicle that will survive Paris-Dakar. I realize, of course, that the car isn't everything—that's why I wanted to talk to you about the two rallies you ran, to get the benefit of your experience."

"You haven't been racing since you hurt your ankle," Chelsea said. "What have you been doing, Father?"

Sheffield shrugged. "Consulting, training other drivers, conducting track courses—"

"We're willing to pay you for your time to help us," she said.

Sheffield felt himself blush slightly. God, she knew how to cut.

"That won't be necessary," he said. "I'll help you all I can." He wanted to add, "After all, you *are* my daughter," but he didn't.

As he and Jane walked home, she said, "That was nice, Jack, saying you'd help them for nothing."

"Nice, maybe, but not very practical. I could have used the money. I haven't made a franc in fourteen months."

Jane shrugged. "What does that matter? I earn enough for both of us."

It mattered to Sheffield . . .

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Sheffield began going to Montmartre every day. In addition to talking to Austin about the route and terrain of the rally, he also helped him make certain modifications on Max One.

"You've got to put locks on the doors, kid. There may be times when both of you have to be away from the car at once and there are places along the route where people will steal you blind."

Holes were drilled and locks placed.

"Paint a line on the steering wheel exactly where your front wheels are aligned straight. That way, when you hit a pothole and bounce, or when you speed off a dune, you can adjust the wheels and land straight. It'll keep you from flipping over. Use luminous paint so you can see the line after dark."

Luminous paint was secured and the line put on.

A lot of Sheffield's advice was practical rather than technical. "Get rid of those blankets. It gets down to twenty degrees in the Sahara at night. Buy lightweight sleeping bags. And stock up on unsalted nuts, granola bars, high-potency vitamins, caffeine tablets. You'll need a breathing aid, too, for when you land in somebody's dust wake. Those little gauze masks painters use worked fine for me."

Most times when Sheffield went to Montmartre, Chelsea wasn't around. Austin always explained that she was running errands or doing this or that, but Sheffield could tell that he was embarrassed by the excuses. His daughter, Sheffield realized, obviously didn't want to see him any more than necessary. He tried not to let it bother him. Becoming more friendly each visit with Austin helped. The young man didn't repeat Chelsea's offer to pay him for his time, seeming to understand that it was insulting, and for that Sheffield was grateful. No one, not even Jane, knew how serious Sheffield's financial predicament was.

No one except Marcel.

One afternoon when Sheffield got back from Montmartre, Marcel was waiting for him at a table in the cafe Sheffield had to pass through to get to his rooms. "Jack, my friend," he hailed, as if the encounter were mere chance, "come join me." Snapping his fingers at the waiter, he ordered, "Another glass here."

Sheffield sat down. At a nearby table were two thugs who accompanied the diminutive Marcel everywhere he went. One was white, with a neck like a bucket and a walk like a wrestler's. The other was cafe au lait, very slim, with obscene lips and a reputation for

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being deadly with a straight razor. After glancing at them, Sheffield drummed his fingers silently on the tablecloth and waited for the question Marcel invariably asked first.

"So, my friend, tell me, how are things with you?"

To which Sheffield, during the past fourteen months anyway, always answered, "The same, Marcel, the same."

Marcel assumed a sad expression. Which was not difficult since he had a serious face, anyway, and had not smiled, some said, since puberty. His round little countenance would have reminded Sheffield of Peter Lorre except that Marcel's eyes were narrow slits that, despite their owner's cordiality, clearly projected danger.

"I was going over my books last week, Jack," the Frenchman said as he poured Sheffield a Pernod, "and I must admit I was a little surprised to see how terrible your luck has run all year. I mean, horse races, dog races, prizefights, soccer matches—you seem to have forgotten what it is to pick a winner. Usually, of course, I don't let anyone run up a balance so large, but I've always had a soft spot for you, Jack."

"You know about the car in Montmartre, don't you?" Sheffield asked pointedly.

"Of course," Marcel replied at once, not at all surprised by the question. "I've known about it since it arrived in Marseilles." Putting a hand on Sheffield's arm, he asked confidentially, "What do you think of it, Jack?"

Sheffield moved his arm by raising the Pernod to his lips. "It's a fine car. One of the best I've ever seen."

"I'm glad you're being honest with me," Marcel said. "I've already had a man get into the garage at night to look at it for me. He was of the same opinion. He says it can win the rally."

Sheffield shook his head. "They're a couple of kids, Marcel. They may finish—they won't win."

Marcel looked at him curiously. "What is a young man like this Austin Trowbridge able to pay you, anyway?"

"I'm not being paid."

Marcel drew back his head incredulously. "A man in your financial situation? You work for nothing?"

"I used to know the kid's father," Sheffield said. Then he added, "I used to know his girl friend's father, too."

Marcel studied the American for a moment. "Jack, let me be as candid with you as you are being with me. There are perhaps two dozen serious vehicles for which competition licenses have been se-

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cured for this year's rally. The car my associates and I are backing is a factory-built Peugeot driven by Georges Ferrand. A French driver in a French car. Call it national pride if you wish, call it practical economics—the fact is that we will have a great deal of money at risk on a Ferrand win. Of the two dozen or so vehicles that will seriously challenge Ferrand, we are convinced he will outdistance all but one of them. That one is the Trowbridge car. It is, as you said, a fine car. We have no statistics on it because it did not run in the optional trials at Cergy-Pontoise. And we know nothing about young Trowbridge himself as a driver: whether he's capable, has the stamina, whether he's *hungry*. The entire entry, car and driver, presents an unknown equation which troubles us."

"I've already told you, Marcel: the car can't win."

The Frenchman fixed him in an unblinking stare. "I want a guarantee of that, Jack." He produced a small leather notebook. "Your losses currently total forty-nine thousand francs. That's about eight thousand dollars. I'll draw a line through the entire amount for a guarantee that the Max One will not outrun Ferrand's Peugeot."

"You're not concerned whether it finishes?"

"Not in the least," Marcel waved away the consideration. "First place wins, everything else loses."

Sheffield pursed his lips in brief thought, then said, "All right, Marcel. It's a bargain."

Later, in their rooms, Jane said, "I saw you in the cafe with Marcel. You haven't started gambling again, have you?"

"Of course not." It wasn't a lie. He had never stopped.

"What did he want, then?"

"He and his friends are concerned about Austin's car. They know I'm helping the kid. They want a guarantee that the Max One won't ace out the car they're backing."

Jane shook her head in disgust. "What did you tell him?"

"That he had nothing to worry about. Austin's not trying to win, he only wants to finish."

"But you didn't agree to help Marcel in any way?"

"Of course not." Sheffield looked away. He hated lying to Jane, yet he did so regularly about his gambling. This time, though, he swore to himself, he was going to quit—when the slate was wiped clean with Marcel, he had made up his mind not to bet on anything again, not racing, not boxing, not soccer, not even whether the Eiffel Tower was still standing. And he was going to find work, too—some

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kind of normal job, maybe in an automobile factory, so he could bring in some money, settle down, plan for some kind of future. Jane, after all, was almost thirty; she wouldn't be able to kick her heels above her head in the Crazy Horse chorus line forever.

And his bargain with Marcel wouldn't matter to Austin and Chelsea, he emphasized to his conscience. All Austin had to do to get his design center was finish the race, not win it.

That night while Jane was at the club, Sheffield went to a bookstall on the Left Bank that specialized in racing publications. He purchased an edition of the special Paris-Dakar Rally newspaper that listed each vehicle and how it had performed in the optional trials at Cergy-Pontoise. Back home, he studied the figures on Ferrand's Peugeot and on several other cars which appeared to have the proper ratios of weight-to-speed necessary for a serious run. There was a Mitsubishi that looked very good, a factory-sponsored Mercedes, a Range Rover, a Majorette, a little Russian-built Lada, and a Belgian entry that looked like a VW but was called an Ostend.

For two hours he worked and reworked the stats on a pad of paper, dividing weights by distance, by average speeds, by days, by the hours of daylight which would be available, by the average wind velocity across the Sahara, by the number of stops necessary to adjust tire pressure, by a dozen other factors that a prudent driver needed to consider. When he finished, and compared his final figures with the figures he had estimated for Austin Trowbridge's car, Sheffield reached an unavoidable conclusion: the Max One might—just *might*—actually win the rally.

Sheffield put on his overcoat and went for a walk along the Champs-Elysees and on into the deserted Tuileries. The trees in the park were wintry and forlorn, the grass grey from its nightly frost, and the late-November air thin and cold. Sheffield limped along, his hands deep in his pockets, chin down, brow pinched. Marcel had used the word "guarantee"—and that's what Sheffield had agreed to: a guarantee that the Max One wouldn't win. But the car, Sheffield now knew, was even better than he'd thought: it *could* win. In order to secure his guarantee to Marcel, Sheffield was left with but one alternative. He had to tamper with the car.

Sheffield sat on a bench in the dark and brooded about the weaknesses of character that had brought him to his present point in life. He wondered how much courage it would take to remain on the bench all night and catch pneumonia and freeze to death. The longer he thought about it, the more inviting it seemed. He sat there until

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he became very cold. But eventually he rose and returned to the rooms above the cafe.

The following week, after conceiving and dismissing a number of plans, Sheffield asked Austin, "What are you going to do about oil?"

"The rally supply truck sells it at the end of every stage, doesn't it? I thought I'd buy it there every night."

"That's okay in the stages where everything goes right," Sheffield pointed out. "But the rally supply truck is only there for a couple of hours and then starts an overnight drive to the next stage. If you get lost or break down or even blow a tire, you could miss the truck and have to run on used oil the entire next day. You need to carry a dozen quarts of your own oil for emergencies."

"I hate to add the weight," Austin said reluctantly.

"I know of a garage that will seal it in plastic bags so you can eliminate the cans," Sheffield said. "That'll save you a couple of pounds."

"You really think it's necessary?"

"I'd do it," Sheffield assured him. Austin finally agreed. "Tell me the grade you want and I'll get it for you," Sheffield said.

Austin wrote down the viscosity numbers of an oil density that was perfect for the Max One's engine. On his way home, Sheffield stopped by the garage of which he had spoken. Before he ordered the bags of oil, he drew a line through some of Austin's numbers and replaced them with figures of his own—lower figures which designated less constancy in the oil's lubricating quality.

Several days later, the garage delivered to the rooms above the cafe a carton containing the bagged oil. Jane was home and accepted the delivery. The garageman gave her a message for Sheffield.

"Our mechanic said to tell Monsieur that if this oil is for a rally vehicle, it should be several grades lighter. This viscosity will reduce engine efficiency as the air temperature drops."

When the garageman left, Jane saw taped to the top bag the slip of paper with the viscosity numbers altered. When Sheffield returned from Montmartre, she asked him about it.

"Yes, I changed them," he said, his tone deliberately casual. "The oil Austin specified was too light."

"Does he know you changed his figures?"

"Sure."

"Are you lying to me, Jack?" She had been exercising and was in black leotards, hands on hips, concern wrinkling her brow.

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"Why would I lie about a thing like motor oil?" Sheffield asked.

"I don't know. But I've had an uneasy feeling since I saw you with Marcel. If you're in some kind of trouble, Jack—"

"I'm not in any kind of trouble," he said, forcing a smile.

"You're not trying to get back at Chelsea for the way she's acting toward you, I hope."

"Of course not."

"Jack," she said, "I called Austin and said I thought the garage made a mistake. I read him your numbers and he said they were wrong."

"You *what?*" Sheffield stared at her. The color drained from his face. Jane sighed wearily and sat down.

"I knew it. I could feel it."

Sheffield felt a surge of relief. "You didn't call Austin."

She shook her head. "No." Her expression saddened. "Why are you doing it, Jack?"

Sheffield poured himself a drink and sat down and told her the truth. He told her about the lies of the past fourteen months, the money he'd bet and lost, the circle of desperation that had slowly been closing in on him. "I saw a way out," he pleaded.

"By hurting someone who trusts you?"

"No one will be hurt," he insisted. "Austin doesn't have to win, all he has to do—"

"Is finish," she completed the statement for him. "That's not the point, Jack. It's wrong and you know it."

"Look," he tried to explain, "when Austin uses this heavier oil, all it will do is make the Max One's engine cut down a few R.P.M.s. He probably won't even notice it. The car will slow down maybe a mile an hour."

"It's wrong, Jack. Please don't do it."

"I've *got* to do it," Sheffield asserted. "I've got to get clear of Marcel."

"We can start paying Marcel. I have some savings."

"No." Sheffield stiffened. "I'm tired of being kept by you, Jane."

"*Kept* by me?"

"Yes, kept! You as much as said so yourself when you told my daughter I was marvelous in bed."

"Oh, Jack—surely you don't think Chelsea took me seriously!"

"*I* took you seriously."

Jane stared at him. "If you think you're going to shift onto me some of the responsibility for what you're doing, you're mistaken."

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"I don't want you to take any of the responsibility," he made clear, "but I don't expect you to interfere, either. Just mind your own business."

Jane's eyes hardened. "I'll do that."

In the middle of December, the Crazy Horse closed for two weeks and Jane announced that she was going back to England for the holidays. "Dad's getting on," she said, "and I haven't seen my sister's children since they were toddlers. I'd invite you along but I'm afraid it would be awkward, our not being married and all."

"I understand," Sheffield said. "I'll spend Christmas with Chelsea and Austin."

"I rather thought you would." She hesitated. "Are you still determined to go through with your plan?"

"Yes, I am."

Jane shrugged and said no more.

After she was gone, Chelsea seemed to feel guilty about Sheffield being alone for Christmas. "You're welcome to come here," she said. "I'm not the greatest cook, but—"

"Actually, I'm going to England," he lied. "Jane telephoned last night and said she missed me. I'm taking the boat train on Christmas Eve."

What he actually took on Christmas Eve was a long, lonely walk around the gaily decorated Place de la Concorde, past the chic little shops staying open late along Rue Royale. All around him holiday music played, greetings were exchanged, and the usually dour faces of the Parisiennes softened a bit. When his ankle began to ache, Sheffield bought a quart of gin, a loaf of bread, and a small basket of cold meats and cheese, and trudged back to his rooms. The cafe downstairs was closed, so he had to walk around to the alley and go up the back way. A thin, cold drizzle started and he was glad it had waited until he was almost inside.

Putting the food away, he lighted the little space heater, opened the gin, and sat trying to imagine what the future held for him. The telephone rang that night and several times on Christmas Day, but he did not answer it. He was too involved wondering about the rest of his life. And he was afraid it might be a wrong number.

Sheffield finally answered the telephone the following week when he came in one evening and found it ringing. It was Jane.

"I thought I ought to tell you, I'm staying over for a few days

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longer. There's a new cabaret opening in Piccadilly and they're auditioning dancers the day after New Year's. I'm going to try out. Actually, I've been thinking about working closer to home for a while. Dad's—"

"Yes, I know. Well, then. I wish you luck."

"No hard feelings?"

"Of course not. You?"

"Not any more."

"Let me know how you make out."

"Sure."

After he hung up, Sheffield got the gin out again. He drank until he passed out. It was nearly twelve hours later when he heard an incessant pounding and imagined there was a little man inside his head trying to break out through his left eye with a mallet. When he forced himself to sit upright and engage his senses, he discovered that the pounding was on his door.

He opened the door and Chelsea burst in. "Austin's broken his arm!" she announced, distraught.

On their way to Montmartre, she gave him the details. "We decided to go out for dinner last night, to celebrate finishing the last of the work on the car. We went to a little cafe on rue Lacaur—"

"That's a rough section."

"Tell me about it. On the way home, we were walking past these two guys and one of them made a comment about me. Austin said something back, and before I knew it both of them jumped him. They beat him up badly and one of them used his knee to break Austin's arm like a stick of wood. It was awful!"

In the rooms over the garage, Austin was in bed with an ice compress on his face and his right arm in a cast. "Two years of work down the tubes," he said morosely.

"It could have been worse," Sheffield told him. "People have been shot and stabbed on that street."

"I thought for a minute one of them was going to slice Austin with a razor," Chelsea said.

"A razor?" Sheffield frowned. "What kind of razor?"

"One of those barber's razors. The kind that unfolds like a pocket knife."

"A straight razor," Sheffield said quietly. An image of Marcel's two bodyguards came into focus. The thin one carried a straight razor and the other one looked strong enough to break arms.

Sheffield managed to keep his anger under control while he tried

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to reconcile Austin and Chelsea to the fact that it wasn't the end of the rally for them. He gave Austin the names of four drivers he knew who weren't signed up for Paris-Dakar this year and might consider an offer to make the run. Two were here in Paris, one was in Zurich, and the other at his home in Parma. "Call them and see what you can do," he said. "I'll go back to my place and see if I can think of any others."

As soon as he left the garage, he went to a telephone kiosk around the corner and called Marcel's office.

"You son of a bitch," he said when the Frenchman came on the line. "We had an arrangement that *I* was to keep Austin Trowbridge from winning."

"That is not precisely correct," Marcel said. "You agreed to take care of the *car*. I decided, because of the amount of money at risk, that it would be best to protect your guarantee with an additional guarantee."

"That wasn't necessary, you son of a bitch!"

"That's twice you've called me that," Marcel said, his tone icing. "I've overlooked it up to now because I know you're angry. Please refrain from doing it again, however. For your information—" his voice broke slightly "—my mother was a saint."

"I don't think you had a mother," Sheffield said coldly. "I think you crawled up out of a sewer!" Slamming down the receiver, he left the kiosk and stalked across the street to a bar. He had a quick drink to calm himself down, then another, which he drank more slowly as he tried to decide what to do. There was no way he could turn in Marcel's thugs without admitting his own complicity to Austin and Chelsea. And it was Marcel he wanted to get even with. But Marcel was always protected. How the hell did you take revenge on someone with the protection he had?

As Sheffield worried it over, the bartender brought him change from the banknote with which he'd paid for his drinks. Sheffield stared at the francs on the bar and suddenly thought: *Of course*. You didn't hurt a man like Marcel physically, you hurt him financially.

Leaving the second drink unfinished, something Sheffield hadn't done in years, he left the bar and hurried back to the rooms over the garage. Austin and Chelsea were at the telephone.

"The two drivers here turned us down," Austin said. "I'm about to call the one in Zurich."

"Forget it," Sheffield said flatly. "I'm driving the Max One for you . . ."

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It wasn't yet dawn in the Place d'Armes where the race was to start, but a thousand portable spotlights created an artificial daylight that illuminated the four lines of vehicles in eerie silver light. A hundred thousand spectators jammed the early-morning boulevard on each side, waving flags, signs, and balloons, cheering select cars and select drivers, the women throwing and sometimes personally delivering kisses, the men reaching past the lines of gendarmes to slap fenders and shout, *"Bon courage!"*

Young girls, the kind who pursue rock stars, walked the lines seeking autographs and more while their younger brothers and sisters followed them throwing confetti. Everyone had to shout to be heard in the general din.

The Max One was in 182nd starting position, which put it in the forty-sixth row, the second car from the inside. Chelsea, in a racing suit, stood with Austin's good arm around her, both looking with great concern at Jack as he wound extra last-minute tape over the boot around his weak ankle.

"Are you absolutely sure about this, Jack?" the young designer asked. "It's not worth further damage to your ankle."

"I'm positive," Sheffield said. "Anyway, we'll be using Chelsea's feet whenever we can." Looking up, he grinned. "You just be in Dakar to receive the trophy."

"That trophy will be yours, Jack."

"The prize money will be mine," Sheffield corrected. "The trophy will be yours."

There was a sudden roar from the crowd and a voice announced through static in the loudspeaker that the first row of four vehicles had been waved to a start. The rally had begun.

"Kiss him goodbye and get in," Sheffield said, shaking hands with Austin, then leaving the couple alone for the moments they had left.

Presently father and daughter were side by side, buckled and harnessed in, adrenaline rushing, their bodies vibrating from the revving engine, their eyes fixed on the white-coated officials who moved down the line and with a brusque nod and a wave started each row of four vehicles five seconds apart.

Sheffield grinned over at Chelsea. "I wonder what your mother would say if she could see us now?"

"I know exactly what she'd say: 'Birds of a feather.' "

"Well, maybe we are," Sheffield said.

"Let's don't get sentimental, Father," Chelsea replied. "Driving together from Paris to Dakar doesn't make a relationship."

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Looking at her determined young face, Sheffield nodded. "Whatever you say, kid."

A moment later, they were waved away from the starting line.

From Paris to Barcelona would have been 850 kilometers if the road had been straight. But it wasn't. It wound through Loiret, Cher, Creuse, Correze, Cantal, and more—as if the route had been designed by an aimless schoolboy on a bicycle. Nearly all the way, the roadsides were lined with cheering, waving, kiss-throwing well-wishers shouting, *"Bonne chance!"* From time to time, flowers were thrown into the cars as they bunched up in a village and were forced to slow down. Farther south, cups of *vin ordinaire,* slices of cheese, and hunks of bread were shared. The farther away from Paris one got, the more relaxed and cheerful were the French people.

Sheffield and Chelsea didn't talk much during the trip south. She was already missing Austin and Sheffield was concentrating on finding ways to relieve pressure on his weak ankle by holding his foot in various positions. These preoccupations and the increasingly beautiful French countryside kept them both silently contemplative. The Paris-to-Barcelona stage of the rally was a liaison—a controlled section of the route in which all positions remained as they had started—so it wasn't necessary to speed or try to pass. A few vehicles invariably broke down the first day, but for the most part it was little more than a tourist outing. The real race would not begin until they reached Africa.

It was after dark when they crossed the Spanish border and well into the late Spanish dinner hour when they reached Barcelona. As the French had done, the Spaniards lined the streets to cheer on the smiling, still fresh drivers in their shiny, unbattered vehicles. Because of the crowds, and the absence of adequate crowd control, the great caterpillar of vehicles inched its way down to the dock, where the Spanish ferry that would take them to Algiers waited. It was midnight when Sheffield and Chelsea finally drove onto the quay, had their papers examined, and boarded the boat. The first day, eighteen and a half hours long, was over.

Crossing the Mediterranean, Sheffield and Chelsea got some rest and nourishment and met some of the other drivers. Sheffield was well known by most of them already. (He had asked Chelsea ahead of time how she wanted to be introduced. "I don't have to say I'm your father if you'd rather I didn't," he told her. She had shrugged.

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"It makes no difference to me. Everyone knows we don't choose our parents." "Or our children," Sheffield added.) He introduced her simply as Chelsea and told everyone she was the vehicle designer's girl friend.

Ferrand, the French driver, Vera Kursk, a shapely but formidable-looking Russian woman, and Alf Zeebrug, a Belgian, all expressed great interest in the Max One's structural configuration. They were, Sheffield remembered from his computations, the three favorites to win the rally: Ferrand in his Peugeot, Vera Kursk in a Lada, Zeebrug in the Volkswagen lookalike called an Ostend.

As they studied the Max One, Ferrand winked at Sheffield and said, "So, you've brought in—what do you Americans call it, a ringer?"

Vera nodded her head knowingly. "I see why you passed up the trial races, Jack. Foxy."

"Let us look under the hood, Jack," pressed Zeebrug, knowing Sheffield wouldn't.

In the end, Ferrand spoke for them all when he said, "Welcome back, Jack. It's good to race with you again." Vera gave him a more-than-friendly kiss on the lips.

Later Chelsea said, "They all seem like nice people."

"They are," Sheffield said. "They're here for the race, nothing else: no politics, no nationalism, no petty jealousies. Just the race." Ferrand, Sheffield was convinced, knew nothing about Marcel's machinations in favor of the Peugeot. Had he known, Ferrand—an honorable man and an honest competitor—would have withdrawn and probably sought out Marcel for physical punishment.

Another comment Chelsea made just before they docked was, "They all seem to like and respect you, Father."

"There are some quarters in which I'm not a pariah," he replied. "Believe it or not."

In Africa, the first stage was Algiers to Ghardaia. Sheffield stuck a handprinted list to the dashboard between them. It read:

Ferrand–Peugeot
Kursk–Lada
Zeebrug–Ostend
Sakai–Mitsubishi
Gordon–Range Rover
Smythe–Majorette

"These are the drivers and cars to beat," he told Chelsea. "I had

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a Mercedes on the list, too, but the driver was drinking too much on the ferry and bought a bottle of scotch to take with him when we docked. I don't think we'll have to worry about him."

Chelsea looked at him curiously. "I thought we were only in this to finish, so that Austin can get his design center."

Sheffield fixed her in a flat stare. "I'm a racer, kid. I enter races to *win*. This one is no exception. If you don't want to go along with that, you can get off here."

Chelsea shook her head determinedly. "Not on your life."

Sheffield had to look away so she wouldn't see his pleased smile.

During the first stage, it seemed to Chelsea that every car, truck, and motorcycle in the rally was passing them. "Why aren't we going faster?" she demanded.

"It's not necessary right now," Sheffield told her. "All these people passing us are the showboats—rich little boys and girls with expensive little toys. They run too fast too quickly. Most of them will burn up their engines before we get out of Algeria. Look over there—"

Chelsea looked where he indicated and saw Ferrand, Vera Kursk, and the other experienced drivers cruising along at moderate speed just as Sheffield was doing. "I guess I've got a lot to learn," she said.

At Ghardaia, their sleeping bags spread like spokes around a desert campfire, the drivers discussed the day. "Let's see," Zeebrug calculated, "three hundred forty-four vehicles started and so far one hundred eighteen have dropped out."

"Good numbers," Ferrand said.

Vera Kursk smiled. "This could turn into a race instead of a herd."

Chelsea noticed that the Russian woman and Sheffield shared a little evening brandy from the same cup and that earlier, when the sleeping bags were spread, Vera had positioned hers fairly close to Sheffield's. Commie slut, she thought. When no one was paying any attention, Chelsea moved her own sleeping bag between them.

It took a week to get out of Algeria—a week in which Sheffield and the other experienced drivers continued to drive at reasonable, safe speeds that were easy on their engines, tires, and the bodies of both car and driver. All along the route, vehicles were dropping out—throwing pistons, getting stuck in sand, blowing too many tires, sliding off soft shoulders into gullies, dropping transmissions, or the exhausted drivers simply giving up. The Mercedes quit the second day—its driver, as Sheffield had predicted, drinking too much

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liquor for the heat he had to endure and the stamina required to drive. A surprise dropout was the Mitsubishi. Driven by the Japanese speed-racer Sakai, it had hit a sand-concealed rock and broken its front axle. "One down, five to go," Sheffield said, drawing a line through Sakai's name on the dashboard list.

By the time they crossed into Niger, an additional sixty-three vehicles had dropped out. "That leaves one hundred sixty-three in," said Smythe, the Englishman driving the Majorette, when they camped that night. He was feeling good about the dropouts. At noon the next day, he joined them when the Majorette burned up its gearbox.

"Two down, four to go," Sheffield told Chelsea, and drew another line.

After camping one night in Chirfa, Chelsea noticed the next morning that Sheffield and Ferrand and the others shook hands all around and wished each other good luck. "What was that all about?" she asked.

"Everyone will be camping alone from now on," he said. "The socializing is over." Sheffield pointed toward a band of haze on the horizon. "We got into the Tenere Desert today. Now we start racing."

The terrain they encountered that day was hell on a back burner. The Max One was in ashlike sand up to its axles, plowing along like a man walking against a gale wind. The stink of the desert decay was unexpected and appalling to Chelsea. She gagged repeatedly. Huge white rats the size of rabbits leaped at the car windows. This stage of the rally that crossed the Tenere was a nightmare in glaring daylight no newcomer was ever prepared for.

Camped alone that night in some rocks above the desert floor, Chelsea saw Sheffield massaging his foot. "How's the ankle?" she asked.

"Just a little stiff. It'll be okay."

"Let's switch places tomorrow," she suggested. "I'll drive and you relieve." Up to then, Sheffield had done eighty percent of the driving. "Tomorrow," Sheffield told her, "we go over the Azbine Plain. It's like driving across a huge corrugated roof."

"Let me drive," she said quietly. "I can manage it."

He let her drive—and she took them across the rough terrain like a pilgrim determined to get to Mecca. Along the way, they saw Zeebrug lying at the side of the road, a rally first-aid team inflating

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a splint on his leg. The Ostend was nearby, upside down in a ditch, one wheel gone.

"Three and three," Sheffield said. He handed Chelsea the marker and she crossed off Zeebrug's name.

Into the second week of the race, both Jack and Chelsea began to feel the strain of the collective pressures: the usually unheated, quickly eaten food that wreaked havoc with their digestion, the constant jarring and jolting of the car that pummeled their bodies, the freezing nights sleeping on the ground, the scorching, glaring sun by day, the sand and dirt in their mouths, ears, eyes, noses, the constant headaches and relentless fatigue that the short rests could not remedy. Depression set in, underscored by the begging of poverty-stricken Africans everywhere they stopped.

"Cadeau," the black children pleaded as Sheffield adjusted his tire pressure. *"Cadeau,"* they whined as Chelsea filled the radiator from a village stream.

"We have no gifts," Sheffield told them in English, in French, and by a firm shaking of his head. "Try to ignore them," he advised Chelsea, and she did try, but her eyes remained moist. As did his.

Just over the border in Mali, their physical and mental distress was displaced in priority and urgency by problems the Max One began to develop. A fuel line cracked and split, and they lost considerable petrol before Chelsea noticed the trail it was leaving behind them and they stopped to repair it. The lost fuel had to be replaced at a township pump at exorbitant cost. Later the same day, for no apparent reason, a center section of the windshield bubbled and cracked. Sheffield patched it with some of the tape he had brought for his ankle. The very next day, the odometer cable snapped and they were unable to monitor their distance to the end of the stage.

"Austin's damned car," Chelsea seethed, "is falling apart."

"It's holding up better than most." Sheffield bobbed his chin at two cars, two trucks, and a motorcycle that had dropped out at the side of the road. By then, seventy-one more vehicles had quit the rally, leaving ninety-two still in.

Near Timbuktu, Sheffield and Chelsea happened on a small water pond that no one else seemed to notice. Behind a high rise, it had a few trees, some scrub, and even a patch of Gobi grass. "We've died and gone to heaven," Chelsea said when she saw the water. She began undressing. "I hope you're not modest."

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"Not if you aren't."

They took their first bath in two weeks, and when they were clean they rubbed salve on their hips and shoulders where the Max One's seatbelts and harnesses had rubbed the skin raw.

"Mother never went with you when you raced, did she?" Chelsea asked reflectively.

"No."

"Who took care of you when you got hurt?"

"Whoever was around," Sheffield said. He looked off at the distance.

Chelsea patted his head maternally. "If you get hurt in this race, *I'll* take care of you," she assured him. Then she turned away to dress, as if her words embarrassed her where her nakedness had not.

After Mali, they crossed into Mauritania. The topography of the route seemed to change every day. One stage would be a mazelike, twisting and turning trail along a dry riverbed, in turn sandy and dusty, then suddenly muddy where an unexpected patch of water appeared. Then they would encounter a long, miserable stage of deep ruts and vicious potholes, then a log-and-rock-strewn track that shook their teeth and vibrated agonizingly in Sheffield's weak ankle.

With each kilometer, his pain grew more intense. During the day he swallowed codeine tablets. At night Chelsea put wet compresses on his ankle and massaged his foot. Those days they came to a stage that was open, flat straightaway, Chelsea did the driving and Sheffield enjoyed temporary respite from the pain.

Nearly every day they caught glimpses of Ferrand, Vera Kursk, and the Australian Gordon in his Range Rover. There were no smiles, waves, or shouted greetings now—just grim nods that said, So you're still in it, are you? Well, so am I.

Into the third grueling week, the pain, fatigue, and depression evolved into recriminations. "How in hell did I let myself get into this mess anyway?" Sheffield asked as he untaped his swollen ankle one night. "I don't owe Austin Trowbridge *or* you anything."

"How did *you* get into it!" Chelsea shot back. "How did *I* get into it! I'm making the same damned mistake my mother made—getting mixed up with a man who thinks speed is some kind of religion."

"I could be back in Paris going to old movies," Sheffield lamented, "eating sausages with homemade mustard, drinking gin."

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"And I could be in Philadelphia going to club meetings and playing tennis with your *other* daughter."

They caught each other's eyes in the light of the campfire and both smiled sheepishly. Chelsea came over and kneeled next to her father. "I'll do that," she said, and tended to his ankle.

Later, when he got into his sleeping bag and she was preparing to stand the first two-hour watch, flare gun at the ready, she looked very frankly at him. "You know," she said, her voice slightly hoarse from the dryness, "if we weren't blood relatives, I might find myself attracted to you."

Sheffield stayed awake most of the two hours he should have been sleeping. This was one race he would be very glad to have over—for more reasons than his swollen ankle.

From Mauritania, the route cut north across the border of the Spanish Sahara for a hundred or so kilometers of hot sand, between the wells of Tichia in the east and Bir Ganduz in the west. During that stage, with seventy-one vehicles of the original 344 still in the race, there was much jockeying for position, much cutting in, out, and around, much risky driving on soft shoulders, and much blind speeding as the dust wake of the vehicle in front reduced visibility to the length of your hood. It was a dangerous stage, driven with goggles and mouth masks, clenched jaws, white knuckles, tight sphincters, and the pedal to the metal, no quarter asked, none given.

In a one-on-one, side-by-side dash to be the first into a single lane between two enormous dunes, Chelsea at the wheel of the Max One and Gordon in his Range Rover were dead even on a thousand-yard straightaway, both pushing their vehicles to the limit, when Gordon glanced over at the Max One and smiled in his helmet at the sight of the girl, not the man, doing the driving. He had the audacity to take one hand off the wheel and wave goodbye as he inched ahead.

"You bastard," Chelsea muttered and juiced the Max One's engine by letting up on the accelerator two inches, then stomping down on it, jolting the automatic transmission into its highest gear and shooting the car forward as if catapulted. With inches to spare, she sliced in front of Gordon at the point where the dunes came together, surprising him so that he swerved, went up an embankment, and immediately slid back down, burying the Range Rover's rear end in five feet of what the nomad Arabs, translated, called "slip sand": grains that, although dry, held like wet quicksand. The Australian

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would, Sheffield knew, be stuck for hours, and was effectively out of the race as far as finishing up front was concerned.

"Nice work, kid," he said. Now they had only Ferrand and Vera Kursk with whom to contend.

That night they camped along with the other remaining drivers around the oasis well at Bir Ganduz. When the rally starts for the day were announced, they learned that seventeen more vehicles had fallen by the wayside on the Spanish Sahara stage, leaving fifty-four competitors: thirty-eight cars, ten trucks, and six motorcycles. Ferrand was in the lead position, one of the cyclists second, Vera Kursk third, one of the trucks fourth, another cyclist fifth, and the Max One sixth.

"Are you disappointed we aren't doing better?" Chelsea asked as they changed oil and air filters.

Sheffield shook his head. "We can pass both cyclists and the truck any time we want to. And probably will, tomorrow. It'll come down to Ferrand, Vera, and us."

"Do you think we can beat them?"

Sheffield smiled devilishly. "If we don't, we'll scare hell out of them." For a moment then he became very quiet. Presently he handed Chelsea a plastic jar. "Hustle over to the control truck and get us some distilled water."

"The battery wells aren't low—I just checked them."

"I want some extra, anyway, just in case. Go on."

As soon as she was out of sight, Sheffield reached into the car and got the flare gun. Turning to a stand of trees in deep shadows twenty feet from the car, he said. "Whoever's in there has got ten seconds to step out where I can see you or I'll light you up like the Arch of Triumph."

From out of the darkness stepped Marcel's two thugs. The one who carried a razor had a sneer on his gaunt brown face. The one with the bucket neck simply looked angry as usual. "We bring greetings from Marcel," said the thin one. "He said to tell you he is willing to be reasonable. Forget what has gone before. You and he will start fresh. He will cancel your debt and give you one hundred thousand francs if you do not overtake Ferrand."

"No deal," Sheffield replied flatly.

"I am authorized to go to a hundred and fifty thousand francs. That is twenty-five thousand dollars—"

"I can add. No deal."

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The other man pointed a threatening finger. "To doublecross Marcel is not very smart—"

Sheffield cocked the flare gun. "You're the one who broke my friend's arm, aren't you? How'd you like to have a multicolored face?"

"No need for that," the thin one said quickly, holding up both hands. "We delivered Marcel's message, we have your answer. We'll go now."

"If I see you again," Sheffield warned them, "I'll tell the other drivers about you. They won't like what they hear. You'll end up either in a sandy grave or a Senegalese prison. I don't know which would be worse."

"Perhaps the young lady has an opinion," the thin man said, bobbing his chin toward the Max One, off to the side of Sheffield. It was the oldest ruse in the world, but Sheffield fell for it. He looked over to his left, and when he did the thin man leaped forward with enough speed and agility to knock the flare gun to the ground before Sheffield could resist. Then the man with the bucket neck was there, shoving him roughly until his back was against the car and driving a boot-toe hard against his painful ankle. Sheffield groaned and started to fall, but the other man held him up long enough to deliver a second brutal kick.

"That's all!" his partner said urgently. "Come on!"

They were gone, leaving Sheffield sitting on the sand clutching his ankle, tears of pain cutting lines on his dry cheeks, when Chelsea got back. She ran over to him. "My God, what happened?"

"I must have stepped in a hole. It's bad—"

The ankle swelled to thrice its normal size. For several hours, Chelsea made trips to and from the public well to draw cold water for compresses. They didn't help. By morning, Sheffield couldn't put any weight at all on the foot.

"That does it, I guess," he said resignedly. "Ferrand and Vera will have to fight it out. But at least Austin will get his design center; you can drive well enough for us to finish."

"I can drive well enough for us to win," Chelsea said. She was packing up their camp. "I proved that yesterday."

"Yesterday was on a flat desert straightaway. From here down the coast to Dakar are narrow, winding roads full of tricky curves, blind spots, loose gravel."

"I can handle it."

"You don't understand," Jack said, with the patience of a parent, "this is the final lap. This is for all the marbles—this is what the

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last twenty days of hell have been all about. These people still in the run are serious competitors—"

"I'm serious, too," Chelsea asserted. "I'm a racer, I'm in this run to win. If you can't accept that, if you don't want to drive with me, drop off here."

Sheffield stared incredulously at her. "You're crazy, kid. Ferrand, Vera, and the others will run you off a cliff into the Atlantic Ocean if they have to."

"They can try." She stowed their belongings on the rear deck and closed the hatchback. "You staying here?"

"Not on your life," Sheffield growled. He hopped over to the car. The passenger side.

The last lap into Dakar was a war on wheels. All caution was left behind on the Spanish Sahara. This was the heavyweight championship, the World Series, and the Kentucky Derby. No one who got this far would give an inch of track. Anything gained had to be taken.

As soon as the stage started, the Max One dropped back to eight, losing two positions as a pair of motorcycles outdistanced them. Chelsea cursed but Sheffield told her not to worry about it. "This is a good stretch for cycles. We'll probably be passed by a few more. They start falling back when we reach Akreidil; the track softens there and they can't maneuver well. Keep your speed at a steady ninety."

Chelsea glanced over. "I don't want advice on how to finish, just how to win."

"That's what you're going to get," Sheffield assured her. "You do the driving, I'll do the navigating. Deal?"

Chelsea nodded curtly. "Deal."

Sheffield tore the piece of paper from the dash and looked at the names of Ferrand and Vera Kursk. Crumbling it, he tossed it out the window.

"Litterbug," she said.

"Shut up and drive, Chelsea."

"Yes, Daddy."

They exchanged quick smiles, then grimly turned their attention back to the track.

By midmorning the Max One was back to eleventh, but Ferrand and Vera had also fallen behind, everyone being outrun by the six

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daredevil cyclists still in the rally. This was their moment of glory and they knew it. They would lead the last lap of the run for three magnificent hours, then—as Sheffield had predicted—start falling behind at Akreidil. From that point on, the four-wheeled vehicles overtook and passed them one by one. Ferrand moved back into first place, Vera pressed into second, and the Max One held fourth behind a modified Toyota truck. They were all sometimes mere feet apart on the dangerous track along the Mauritanian coast.

"Blind spot," Sheffield would say as they negotiated weird hairpin turns. "Hug in," he instructed when he wanted Chelsea to keep tight to the inside of the track. "Let up," he said to slow down, "Punch it" to speed up, "Drop one" to go into a lower gear as he saw Ferrand's car suddenly nose up a grade ahead.

Two of the nine trucks behind them started crowding the track south of Mederdra, taking turns ramming into the Max One's rear bumper at ninety k.p.h. "Get ready to brake," Sheffield said. Watching in a sideview mirror, he waited for exactly the right second, then yelled, "Brake!" Chelsea hit the brake and felt a jolt as one of the trucks ricocheted off the Max One's rear fender and shot across the rocky beach into the surf.

"The other one's passed us!" Chelsea shouted.

"I wanted it to," Sheffield said. "Watch."

The truck that had displaced them in fourth place quickly drew up and challenged the truck in third. For sixty kilometers they jockeyed and swerved and slammed sides trying to assert superiority. One kilometer in front of them, Ferrand and Vera held the two lead positions; behind them, Sheffield and Chelsea kept everyone else in back of the Max One to let the trucks fight it out. Finally, on the Senegal border, the crowding truck finally forced number three off the track and moved up to take its place.

"Okay!" Sheffield yelled at Chelsea. "His body's tired but his brain is happy because he just won. The two aren't working together right now. Punch it!"

Chelsea gunned the Max One and in seconds laid it right next to the victorious truck. The driver looked over, surprised. Sheffield smiled at him. Then Sheffield put his hand over Chelsea's and jerked the steering wheel sharply. The Max One leaped to the right, the truck swerved to avoid being hit, the Max One crossed the entire track, and the truck spun around and went backward into a ditch.

"Now let's go after Vera," Sheffield said.

"With pleasure," Chelsea replied.

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It became a three-car race. For more than four hundred kilometers, speeding inland along Senegal's gently undulating sandy-clay plains, the Peugeot, the Lada, and the Max One vied for position. Along straightaways, it became clear that Austin Trowbridge's car was superior in speed to both the French and Russian vehicles. Chelsea caught up with and passed them both. "Yeeee*oh!*" she yelled as she sped into the lead.

"Don't open the champagne yet," Sheffield said.

When the straightaway ended and they once again encountered a stretch of the great continental dunes, the experienced drivers again outmaneuvered and outdistanced the Max One.

"What am I doing wrong?" Chelsea pleaded.

"Hanging out with race-car drivers."

"That's not what I mean!" she stormed, her sense of humor lost in the face of her frustration.

"We'll be on a sandstone flat when we cross the Saloum River," Sheffield calmed her. "You'll have a chance to take the lead again there."

When they reached the flat, Chelsea quickly caught up with Vera Kursk and passed her, and was pressing Ferrand for first place when the accident happened. A pack of hyenas, perhaps a dozen, suddenly ran in front of the Peugeot. Seasoned professional that he was, Ferrand did not swerve an inch as he felt the impact of his grille on the animals he hit and the rumble of his tires on those he ran over. Then one of the hyenas was spun up into the wheel well and, in a mangle of flesh and blood, jammed the axle. Ferrand's front wheels locked and his vehicle flipped end over end, landing a hundred feet out on the flats, bursting into flames.

"Stop the car!" Sheffield ordered, and Chelsea skidded to a halt on the shoulder. They unharnessed and leaped out, Sheffield grabbing the portable fire extinguisher, Chelsea helping him to balance upright on his swollen ankle. As they ran, hobbling, toward the burning car, they became aware that the Lada had also stopped and Vera Kursk was getting out.

At the fiery Peugeot, Sheffield handed Chelsea the extinguisher. "Start spraying the driver's door!" Chelsea pointed the red cylinder and shot a burst of Halon up and down the door. It immediately smothered the flames on that side and Sheffield was able to reach through the window, unstrap Ferrand, and drag him out of the car. Sheffield and Chelsea each took a hand and, Sheffield limping ag-

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onizingly, dragged the unconscious man far enough away so that when the Peugeot exploded none of them were hurt.

From overhead came the sound of a rotor. Looking up, Sheffield and Chelsea saw a rally control helicopter surveying a place to land. Paramedics wearing Red Cross armbands were in an open hatch waiting for touchdown.

"They'll take care of him," Sheffield said. He stood up, holding onto Chelsea for support, and they looked across the flat at the Max One and the Lada parked side by side. Vera Kursk was beside the Lada, peering down the track, where several kilometers back came the surviving vehicles. Smiling, she threw Sheffield and Chelsea a wave and quickly got into her car. Chelsea started running, dragging Sheffield with her. "The bitch!" she said.

"I'd do the same thing in her place," Sheffield groaned.

By the time they were harnessed back into the Max One, the Lada was half a kilometer ahead and the rest of the pack was moving up behind them very quickly. "We're almost to Dakar," Sheffield told his daughter. "If you want to win, you'll have to catch her."

Chelsea got back on the track and shot the car forward like a bullet. Into the African farming communities she sped, watching for animals, people, other vehicles, always keeping the Lada in sight. "Am I gaining on her, do you think?" she asked.

"Not yet."

Through the farmland, into the nearer outskirts, past larger villages, a soap factory, a shoe factory. "Am I gaining?" she shouted.

"Not yet."

Past a power station, a cotton mill, small handicraft shops at the side of the road, a huge open-air market, increasing lines of spectators in marvelously colored native garb. "Am I gaining?"

"Not yet."

"God*damn!*"

Then into the city of Dakar itself and on to the far end of Gann Boulevard, a wide, tree-lined thoroughfare roped off a mere one hour earlier, when the control aircraft advised the city that the first of the rally vehicles was approaching. The boulevard led straight to the finish line in the Place de l'Independence. The Lada was still half a kilometer ahead. "Punch it!" Sheffield yelled. He beat his fist on the dashboard. "Punch it! Punch it!"

Chelsea punched it.

The Max One drew up dead even on the right side of the Lada. The two women exchanged quick, appraising glances, saw only un-

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yielding determination in the other, and, as if choreographed, both leaned into their steering wheels and tried to punch their accelerators through the floorboards. "Come *on!*" Chelsea muttered through her clenched teeth.

The Max One pulled forward an inch. Then two. Then three. Vera Kursk glanced over again, desperation in her eyes. Sheffield yelled, "All right!"

The cars sped down to the finish line next to the war memorial in the great plaza. Thousands cheered them on from a vast crowd that was but a blur of color to the drivers. Stretched across the end of the boulevard, a great banner with FINIS lettered on it fluttered in the breeze. The Max One was less than a car-length ahead, the Lada's windshield even with the American vehicle's rear bumper. Then Vera punched the Lada.

"She's pulling up!" Sheffield cried.

Chelsea saw Vera's face moving closer in the sideview mirror. In seconds, the Russian woman was next to her again. Biting down hard enough on her bottom lip to draw blood, Chelsea punched the Max One again.

The Max One crossed the finish line one and a half seconds ahead of the Lada.

At the banquet that night in the Saint Louis Hotel, Chelsea and Vera Kursk hugged each other and Austin Trowbridge read everyone a cable he had received congratulating him on the Max One and advising him that a bank account had been opened for one million dollars to start the Trowbridge Automotive Design Center. "I'd like you to come back to the States and be my partner," the young man told Sheffield. "Between the two of us, we can come up with cars nobody's ever imagined."

"I'll think about it, kid," Sheffield promised.

At midnight, Sheffield rode with Chelsea and Austin in a taxi out to Grand Dakar Airport, where they watched the Max One being rolled into the cargo hold of a Boeing 747 bound for Casablanca and New York. The young couple had seats in the passenger section of the same plane.

"Austin and I are going to be married when we get home," Chelsea told Sheffield. Austin had gone ahead, giving them time to say goodbye. "And we're going to start having babies. The first boy we have, I'm naming Jack. After a guy I recently met."

"Do yourself a favor," Sheffield said. "Raise him to be a doctor."

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She shook her head. "Not on your life." She kissed him on the cheek. "Bye, Daddy."

"See you, kid."

Sheffield watched the plane rumble down the runway and climb into the starry African sky. Then he sighed and limped slowly off the observation deck and back into the terminal. When he reached the glass exit doors, he was met by the familiar face he'd been expecting.

"Hello, Marcel."

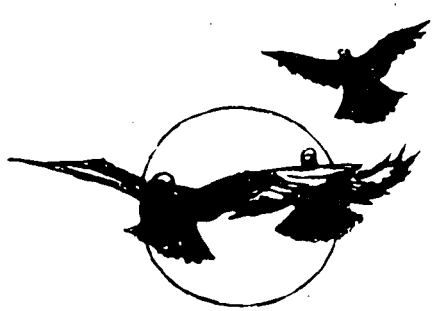
The Frenchman's two thugs were standing nearby.

"The Max One was pressing Ferrand when he crashed," Marcel accused. "You were racing to win."

"I always race to win," Sheffield replied evenly.

"Do you think you can get away with doublecrossing me?" The Frenchman's eyes were narrowed and dangerous.

Sheffield merely shrugged. "What are you going to do, Marcel, kill me?" He cocked his head in the best John Garfield tradition. "Everybody dies," he said arrogantly. And pushing through the doors, he walked painfully out into the Senegalese night.



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SECRETS of the New Age Revealed! Explore New Practices and Philosophies. Cassette Tape $10. Creative Paths, 2371 Delkus Cres., Mississauga, Ont. L5A 1K8 Canada.

DO YOU KNOW "How to Write a Classified Add that pulls?" Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes a certificate worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept., CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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PRINT Booklets 3¢. Print 1000 8½×11, $15.12. Booklet Planning-Pricer Free Speedibooks, 23860 Miles, Cleveland, Ohio 44128.

RECIPES

FIVE STAR AUTHENTIC DESSERTS. NEW YORK CHEESECAKE, APPLE DUMPLINGS, ETC. $3.00 SASE. P.O. Box 776, Port Angeles, WA 98362.

SHERLOCK Holmes' Tea Scones. Recipe: $1.00. Mrs. Hudson, 117 South 11th Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

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15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ _____
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(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months – $144.00 x .85 – $122.40)

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
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(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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JAMES POWELL ("Midnight Pumpkins")

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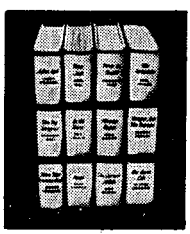

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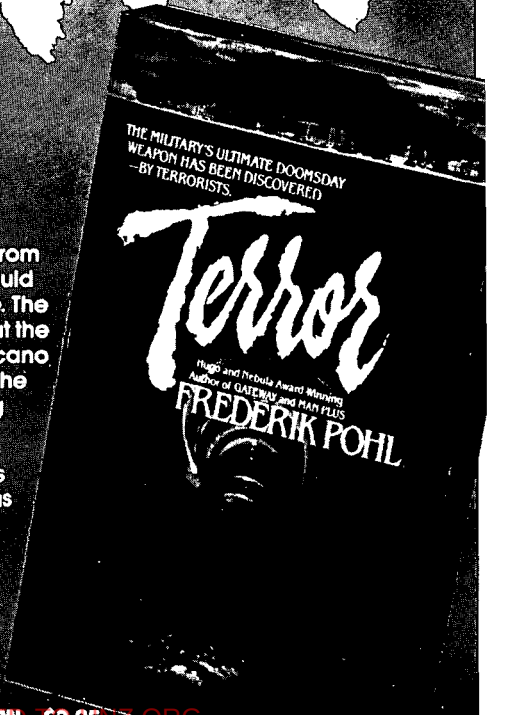
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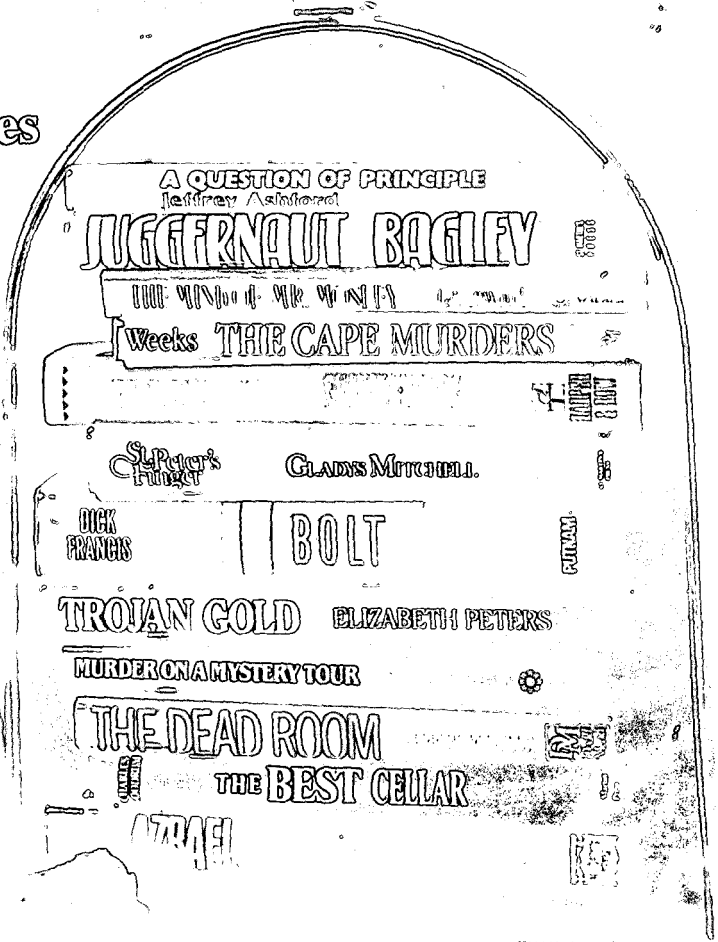

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